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# In Search of a Place to Be: Perspectives of Creative Female Adolescents on their First Year of High School

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IN SEARCH OF A PLACE TO BE: PERSPECTIVES OF CREATIVE FEMALE  
ADOLESCENTS ON THEIR FIRST YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL

by

Anne Arthur

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Faculty of Education  
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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
2011

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28 January 2011

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

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## ABSTRACT

This study undertook to elicit and characterize the transition strategies that creatively-inclined at-risk students adopted to manage their first year of high school in Southeastern Ontario. The grounded theory research design (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) included two semi-structured interviews with 12 female Grade Nine students and a content analysis of their multi-modal journals and provincial report cards. Participants' creative-thinking aptitudes were assessed using the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking and these findings, in combination with interview, journal and report card data were employed to designate four Ideal Types: creatively-inclined participants at high risk of academic failure ( $n = 5$ ); creatively-inclined participants at low risk of academic failure ( $n = 2$ ); creatively-disinclined participants at high risk of academic failure ( $n = 0$ ); and creatively-disinclined participants at low risk of academic failure ( $n = 5$ ). Atlas.ti, a software program designed to facilitate qualitative research, was employed to analyze transcription data utilizing a constant comparative approach. Open, axial, selective and theoretical coding procedures served to identify core data categories (engagement, transition, creative self-identity) and the relationships of each with its conceptual subcategories (academic, intellectual and social engagement; creative pursuits and self-identity; self-perceptions; and transition strategies employed). The results of this investigation suggest that creatively-inclined Grade Nine students who are at high-risk for academic failure: have had fewer opportunities to engage in creative pursuits; possess an undeveloped sense of creative personal identity; employ transition strategies based primarily on psychosocial needs; experience lower levels of academic, intellectual and social engagement; and are prone to engage in high risk behaviours. The discussion traces linkages between the theoretical concepts: self-identity and creativity; creative personal identity and academic engagement; self-perception and intellectual engagement; social engagement and transition strategies employed. Finally, an integrated model for transitioning creatively-inclined students who are at higher risk for academic failure into Grade Nine is proposed.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

### **Laverne**

wordsmith and phrase-maker extraordinaire  
who has generously donated  
rare words that were rattling around in his pocket,  
and has resolved ambiguities, accessorized stale images  
and provided just enough  
pause for thought.

&

### **Graham**

whose earnest stares and charming smiles  
can break the disquietude and stress of a long day –  
smashing it all into a million tiny bits.

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*I owe appreciation to many people.*

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- **Rebecca, Wesley, Matthew, Emily and Zachary** – for waving back at me all these years – providing unconditional love and encouragement;
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- **Anita** – for being my best friend and confidant;
- **Michelle** – for providing weekly support and encouragement ever since that very first rainy day in London;
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

If you've resisted the temptation to tell the teacher, "You're an asshole," which maybe he or she is, and if you don't say, "That's idiotic," when you get a stupid assignment, you will gradually pass through the required filters. You will end up at a good college and eventually with a good job.

Chomsky, 1992

In an interview by *The Rolling Stone*, Noam Chomsky (1992) made the pointed observation that educational institutions in America are politically dependent on three heuristic or experience-based tenets: student compliance, student acquiescence and student conformity. As a result, those students who ask too many questions or who challenge authority in the classroom are pejoratively labeled and dismissed as hyperactive, undisciplined and overemotional; they become marked for failure. By contrast, those students who have learned to be compliant, obedient and submissive are much more likely to succeed, both academically and professionally. Chomsky's comment is a strong indictment of the devaluation of innovative, critical and creative thinking endemic to American schools. However, the reorganization of Ontario's Secondary school systems at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with its unprecedented shift toward standardization of curriculum, rendered Ontario high schools vulnerable to the same harsh critique that Chomsky has leveled at educational institutions in his own country.

In a research study designed to better understand students' resistance to institutional discourse, Field & Olafson (1999) found that typical signs of opposition included "refusing to work, expressing boredom and making fun of

their teachers” (p. 73). Educational institutions were characteristically found to attribute such resistance to individual students’ personal attributes and character traits, rather than to features of the institutional setting itself. To blame students who refuse to adopt a compliant role for their own lack of school success is to firmly locate the roots of student failure within the individual. This lack of consideration of the role of institutional and social factors in school failure underscores the presumption that resistant students are inherently prone to academic failure.

This study intends to probe and uncover system-based factors that contribute to disengagement and risk for academic failure among creatively-inclined Grade Nine students in Ontario’s Secondary schools. It does so by providing both an uninhibited communication format and a semi-structured interview context within which to express their views about the ways their educational institutions may be falling short of meeting their learning needs.

### **Purpose of Study**

Having worked exclusively with at-risk students in Alternative Education settings in Southwestern Ontario over the past seven years, it has been my impression that students who are more creatively-inclined tend also to be at increased risk for both disengagement from the schooling process and failure to graduate. This research investigation is designed to elicit and characterize the transition strategies adopted by creatively-inclined students as they manage their entry year of Secondary school. Since the 1998 introduction of a new curriculum framework in Ontario Secondary schools, with its ensuing increase in drop-out

rates (King, 2003; Levin, 2004), there has been a tide of provincial concern over students at risk. In undertaking to profile at-risk students, most Canadian research to date has clustered around three perspectives: (a) socioeconomic status (Audas & Willms, 2001; Jenson, 2001; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Frempong & Willms, 2002; Levin, 2004); (b) parental involvement/education (Levin, 2004; Volpe, 2000; Willms, 2003); and (c) addressing the special needs of students (Levin, 2004; Schonert-Reichl, 2000; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000). Important investigations have also probed creativity and its role in the adolescent's life (Capossela, 2000; Chin, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Spooner, 2002; Sumara, 2002; Saunders Wickes, & Ward, 2006), while other research has shown the value of the arts in the curriculum (Eisner, 1985:2002; Greene, 1995; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Recent research on student engagement reveals that at-risk students often complain of boredom at school, and of a curriculum that is not relevant to their own experiences (Blankstein, 2007; Brady, 2006; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Gould Lundy, 2006; McEvoy, 2003; Field & Olafson, 1999; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009). Using a narrative inquiry case study approach, this study documents the voices and coping techniques of creatively-inclined students as they navigated through their first year of high school. The intent of this study has been to use the data to discover theoretical propositions that might delineate the transition process for creatively-inclined and at-risk students in their entry year of Secondary school. A further intention of this study has been to develop, based on the theoretical propositions uncovered, an



integrated model useful to educators in understanding how to effectively support those creatively-inclined students who are at increased risk for academic failure in Grade Nine.

### **Ontario Secondary School Curriculum Reform: Implications for Students-at-Risk**

On May 4, 1993, the Government of Ontario announced the establishment of a *Royal Commission on Learning* to “set new directions in education to ensure that Ontario youth are well prepared for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” According to Mutton (1995), this was the “the first major look at education in Ontario since the Hall-Dennis report of 1968.” Two of the key recommendations made by the *Royal Commission on Learning* would come to have a profound effect on Ontario’s Secondary school reform in the late 1990’s. These key recommendations were that “the progress of all students be monitored systematically and thoroughly from the very beginning of their school careers, with an eye to constant improvement both of the individual and the program” and that “the traditional basics do matter and must be learned by all kids at an early age, and be shown to have been learned” (1995). Based in part on the findings of the Royal Commission on Learning as published in September of 1999, Ontario’s Conservative government (under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris) mandated the Ministry of Education and Training to commence implementation of a completely revised curriculum for Ontario Secondary schools. Within this framework, all existing courses were systematically replaced. An entirely new curriculum was introduced in annual increments to an initial cohort of students, beginning in 1998 in their Grade Nine year and ending in their Grade 12 year.

Thus, over a four-year period, an entirely new curriculum became obligatory for Ontario students. Key elements of the curriculum reform implemented under the provincial Conservative government included: a four-year Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD); university, college and workplace streams of study; three (instead of two) compulsory Mathematics courses; four (instead of five) compulsory English courses; and an overall emphasis on non-fiction reading and technical writing.

In her examination of a standards-based education system in the United States, educational theorist Maxine Greene (1995) focuses on the negative effects of a back-to-basics approach that values skill development over personal reflection and critical analysis. Greene proposes that the ultimate purpose of education is to help students and their teachers create meaning in their lives, and to understand who they are as individuals and as members of a community; its primary purpose is not skill development and knowledge acquisition. However, whenever the public perceives students as no longer being adequately prepared for university, college or the workplace, governments are prone to respond by developing a political agenda in which “standards, assessment outcomes and achievement” become the “currency of educational discussion” (Greene, 1995, p. 9). In such a climate, schools become preoccupied with “test scores, ‘time on task,’ management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living people” (Greene, 1995, p. 11). In its renewed focus on accountability, commitment to standardized testing and closing cultural achievement gaps,

Ontario's Conservative government was no exception. As a result of this commitment to standardization, accountability and assessment outcomes, an important part of Ontario's curriculum reform came to include standardized testing.

The Royal Commission of Learning (1994) also proposed legislation to create the Education Quality and Accountability Office to serve as an independent agency under the Conservative government of Ontario with the main goal of creating a method to improve and monitor standards of education in Ontario. In 1995 the Education Quality and Accountability Office was established to operate at arm's length from the Ontario Ministry of Education, with the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of Secondary-level and Elementary-level education in the province through large-scale testing. This agency was funded by the province to create the mandatory, high-stakes Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) to measure the reading and writing competencies of all Grade Ten students. Its mandate also included the development of a standardized Mathematics assessment that all Grade Nine students across Ontario were expected to complete. Mandatory testing in Mathematics and reading and writing at the Grade Three and again at the Grade Six level was also implemented in all Elementary-level schools across Ontario. At the Secondary-school level, such a push toward standardized testing and teacher accountability can, and did, result in an increase in Secondary-school student drop-out rates (Anderson, 2007; Blankstein, 2007; Felder & Brent, 2005, Greene, 1995; Stiggins, 2002; Tomlinson, 2005; Wormelli, 2006). Classroom teachers became

increasingly compelled to teach with the standardized tests in mind (Neil, 2004; Volante, 2004). As a result, more and more classroom time was devoted to meeting stringent but narrower curriculum expectations, and to preparing students for standardized testing (Neil, 2004; Volante, 2004; Wright, 2002).

Convergent with the curriculum restructuring and the push for standardized testing, dramatic changes developed in how assessment would take place. When the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced the policy document *Program Planning and Assessment: The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12* (2000), it signaled a paradigm shift in the theoretical underpinnings of assessment philosophy in Ontario's Secondary schools. A dramatic exchange of the traditional norm-referenced approach for a new criterion-referenced basis for assessment was made. Student performance was now to be measured against a fixed set of criteria – not against the performance of a peer group. Coupled with criterion-referenced assessment came the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training mandate that student behaviour and learning skill development were to be assessed independently of measurements of academic achievement. The Ontario Provincial Report Card was altered to reflect this separation. With that re-orientation came a set of policies that “fundamentally altered assessment and evaluation at the classroom level” (Arthur, Campbell, Stairs, & Watson, 2007, p. 59). Student achievement was now to be based strictly on “the provincial curriculum expectations and the achievement levels outlined in [the] document and in the curriculum policy document for each discipline” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). Because student achievement was to be measured strictly

against a set of achievement criteria and such relative factors as student behavior and skill development could no longer be considered in the assignment of final grades, students who did not meet fixed provincial academic standards for a course by semester end were doomed to forfeit the credit.

Only six months after full implementation of Ontario's educational reforms, the Conservative party lost its bid for re-election and the Liberal party, under the leadership of Premier Dalton McGuinty, came into power in 2003. In a new government-commissioned report (King, 2003) concluded that: "About one quarter of students in the first cohort of the Reorganized Program are unlikely to graduate" (p. 40). Based on the Report on the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario (2003), two key attributes of a newly-defined "at-risk" student group were identified: students unable to demonstrate literacy skills through successful completion of the OSSLT and, as a consequence, held back from graduating with an OSSD; and students who, because they are disengaged, display very poor attendance, and may simply drop out of Secondary school after Grade Ten. For all the advantages of the streamlined and standardized system of educational reform, it immediately brought into sharp relief the dilemma of a newly-defined and rapidly-growing group of disengaged students who were at risk for failing the OSSLT, demonstrated poor attendance records, and were at risk for ultimately dropping out of school without graduating.

According to King's (2003) report, the graduation rate for the first cohort of the new Secondary school program was about 62 percent of the number who had enrolled in Grade Nine four years previously (p. 39). Reacting to this

alarmingly high drop-out rate, the Liberal party of Ontario abruptly allocated \$100 million in new and redirected funding in pursuit of a means to reverse this trend. Given its new priority of enabling at-risk students to earn their Secondary school diplomas, certain themes began to emerge in Ministry of Education discussion papers and policies. These themes centred on how to define a student as being at-risk, and on the role that literacy has to play in these definitions.

The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario (2003), initially defined the term “students at risk” as specifically encompassing “two interconnected risks: failure to acquire literacy skills for learning and, as a consequence, failure to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma” (p.12). One measure taken by the Ontario Ministry of Education to reduce the number of students who failed the OSSLT was to create Adjudication Panels mandated to provide an appeal process for such at-risk students. Another measure was to establish the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) as a classroom-level alternative to the OSSLT. However, successful completion of either the OSSLT or the OSSLC has continued to be a condition for graduation. Ironically, this drive to improve the literacy levels of high school graduates had simultaneously swollen the number of narrowly-defined students at-risk identified in Ontario.

The Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario (2003) went on to characterize at-risk students as “students who are disengaged, with very poor attendance” (p. 13). King (2003) also identified the associated elements of disengagement and poor attendance as contributing to the high failure rates in

some Grade Nine and Ten courses. With these risk factors in mind, in his final report, King (2005) made three strong recommendations designed to improve the likelihood of graduation for students at risk for disengagement and dropping out. These recommendations were: that remediation must begin during the first semester of Grade Nine; that opportunities for credit recovery should be made available to all eligible students; and, most importantly, that courses should be more closely tailored to students' abilities and aspirations" (King, 2005, p. x). These three recommendations became the basis for the Liberal government of Ontario's \$1.3 billion Student Success / Learning to 18 Strategy. The goal of this strategy, encompassing Grades Seven to Twelve, was to increase high school graduation rates and to keep youth engaged in structured learning until age eighteen or until graduation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Ontario's Student Success – Learning to 18 Strategy was also based in part on the findings of the government-commissioned report titled, *Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School* (2005). One of the research strategies of the study was to include in-depth qualitative interviews with 131 early school leavers. These were recruited, in part, on the basis of representing the following student sub-groups: Aboriginal; Francophone; newcomer to Canada; second- and third-generation immigrant and/or refugee; visible minority; lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered; and rural youth. In terms of school-related risk factors, these early school leavers cited "a lack of flexibility and/or passivity on the part of school personnel or

policies” as counterproductive to keeping students in school (Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005, p. 21).

Nowhere was this inflexibility on the part of Ontario school personnel more pronounced than in the zero tolerance discipline policies (an initiative of the Conservative government of Ontario) which often lead to student suspensions and/or expulsion (Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005). Moreover, according to Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens (2005), critics of these supposedly impartial disciplinary mechanisms “argue that school administrators tend to ignore less serious infractions from certain groups of students (i.e. white, middle class) rather than impose harsh punishments, but are more likely to enforce zero tolerance policies when acts are committed by other groups of students (i.e. students of colour/low socio-economic status)” (p. 68). For reasons such as these, they concluded that uneven application of zero tolerance discipline policies implemented by the provincial Conservative government as part of Ontario’s Secondary curriculum reform in the late 1990’s has actually exacerbated the drop-out problem among Secondary school students.

Falconer, Edwards, & MacKinnon (2008) supported the view that socio-economically disadvantaged students have been unfairly targeted by the zero-tolerance discipline policies that came into practice in Secondary schools across Ontario in the late 1990’s. According to these researchers, Ontario’s Conservative government at that time very deliberately embarked on a policy designed to “net out ‘equity’ from the education equation,” and that this was accomplished, in part, through a zero-tolerance discipline philosophy that



resorted to mass suspensions for “complex-needs” and often for economically-disadvantaged young people. Administrators and school boards no longer had the flexibility, the economic support or the political will to deal with the unique learning needs of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, in practice, these zero-tolerance discipline policies were again found to have aggravated rather than reduced early school leaving among students already at risk in Ontario’s Secondary schools (Falconer, Edwards, & MacKinnon, 2008).

The zero-tolerance discipline policies, rooted in Ontario’s Safe Schools Act of 2001, extended the authority to suspend students to include educators in high school classrooms, whereas this had previously been the exclusive right of the Principal. Moreover, Secondary school Principals could expel students, whereas this previously could only be done at the school board level. According to Daniels & Bondy (2008), the “most significant change in the new law was the provision for mandatory suspension, mandatory expulsion and police involvement”, which had the distinct advantage among educators of providing clear and consistent guidelines within a school and across schools in Ontario. The disadvantage of the Safe Schools Act was the lack of flexibility it allowed administrators to consider mitigating factors where students have special circumstances that might affect their behaviour and their problem-solving abilities (Daniels & Bondy, 2008). A 2003 report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission concurred that “since the implementation of the Safe Schools Act, an increased number of students

with disabilities were being suspended/expelled for their behaviour” (Daniels & Bondy, 2008).

A review of the Safe Schools Act was undertaken when Ontario’s newly-elected Liberal government requested that the Safe Schools Action Team examine practices, policies, programs and physical environments related to school safety. Based on consultations with over 700 parents, educators, students and other stakeholders across Ontario, the Safe Schools Action Team (2006) made a number of recommendations, identifying eight themes for priority action in its report titled *Safe Schools Policy and Practice: An Agenda for Action*. These eight priorities for action included the implementation of: (1) preventative measures to promote positive behaviour by students; (2) progressive discipline protocols; (3) relationship building strategies with community partners and parents; (4) a code of conduct consistently applied across the province; (5) programs for suspended/expelled students; (6) education and training concerning human rights, diversity and cultural awareness; (7) a system for improved communication with students, staff, parents and community partners; (8) a framework for accessing all legislation, statutes, policies and regulations related to school safety. Based on the recommendations of the Safe Schools Action Team, *Bill 212 - An Act to amend the Education Act in respect of behaviour, discipline and safety (2008)* built in flexibility and progressive discipline options, while also providing students with education programs while suspended and/or expelled; it was specifically designed to support the needs of students who are at risk for early school leaving.

As outlined above, since the Report on the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario (2003) identified “at-risk” students as being characterized by disengagement and very poor attendance, a great deal of government attention was channeled toward preventing these students from dropping out of high school prior to graduation. Today, in 2010 the Ontario Ministry of Education has heavily invested in student engagement as an avenue to meeting the needs of students at risk. In addressing student engagement, a number of government initiatives have focused on meeting the needs of all students. *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) is one such initiative that openly promotes the need to improve outcomes for students at risk and to reduce the achievement gap for “recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs.” Speak Up is another Ontario Ministry of Education initiative designed to help students get more engaged in learning and their school community. Now in its third year, Speak Up (2010) provides up to \$1500 in grant money for student projects that have been created by students to make school more interesting and engaging. Although such initiatives are worthy and may actually help some students to stay engaged long enough to graduate, they do not address the root issues concerning student engagement and/or disengagement. In particular, such approaches fail to address at a core level the obstacles encountered by students resistant to traditional educational discourse and yet asked to participate each day in a recently instituted and standardized curriculum.

According to the research on student engagement, students themselves do not talk about their need for skill development, improved attendance or the importance of reducing the achievement gap. Rather, students have stated that they want a curriculum that is based on their own unique interests and challenges them to think critically about their worlds (Brady, 2006; Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere, 2004; Donaleen, 2005; Gould Lundy, 2006; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009). They have also indicated that they want an emotionally safe learning environment in which they are free to speak what's on their minds and to explore who they are and who they might become (Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008; Falconer, Edwards, & MacKinnon, 2008; Greene, 1995). Most importantly they have indicated that they want personal connections with their teachers and their peers; they want to feel like they are a valuable part of a community (Brady, 2006; Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere, 2004; Donaleen, 2005; Gould Lundy, 2006; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Greene (1995) too suggested that community can only be achieved by students who are offered a safe space in which they can discover what they have in common with others – a space “infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternate possibilities for their own becoming and their community's becoming” (p. 39). It would seem that in today's context of standardized curriculum reform, students are longing to be engaged in something that is emotionally significant – something that will help them to discover who they really are and to understand that who they are becoming really matters.

Within the context of dramatic shifts in educational philosophy in Ontario Secondary schools during the past decade, this study was designed to document the issues and concerns of creatively-inclined students as they share their unique perspectives on what it means for them to be Grade Nine students in Ontario classrooms today. As part of this study, integrated models have been developed and serve to outline how creatively-inclined participants manage their first year of high school. Grounded in their own shared words, images and ideas, a theory of what it requires for at-risk, creatively-inclined students to become engaged in Secondary school education in Ontario was also examined in this study.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The message has been clear; students do not want learning made easy, they want it to mean something. They want to feel something, to be moved by what they learn; they want to connect deeply with things that matter in the world and matter to them; and they want the chance to make a difference.

Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009)

In a stage drama presented at the Canadian Education Association's symposium for educational leaders in 2007, 27 students from three high schools across Canada shared their ideal of what schools could look like "if we got it right" (Gould Lundy, 2006). Of particular note, they envisioned a school in which all students found the curriculum emotionally significant and yet academically challenging. They imagined a school in which they were passionately engaged in their learning. Interestingly, this same notion of the importance of engagement in learning has become an increasingly prominent theme in recent educational research. In Ontario, this has been driven in part by drop-out rates among Grade Ten Secondary school students – an outcome of the revision of Secondary school curriculum (Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Statistics to date indicate an early school leaver rate of 9.1% in the metropolitan areas and of up to 16% in the rural areas and small towns of Ontario (Canadian Council on Learning, 2005). According to Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, and Rummens (2005), one third of those students who leave school prematurely do so "with a Grade 9 education or less and almost two thirds drop out with Grade 10 or less" (p. 3). Although Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives such as Learning-to-18 were designed specifically to keep more

students in school past Grade Ten, they fail to address the underlying issue of student engagement. According to Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009), student disengagement increases steadily throughout Secondary school and for Grade Nine students in particular, a lack of student engagement leads directly to higher absentee rates and an increased risk for early school leaving.

Although the past decade in Ontario has seen a wave of fundamental educational reforms intended primarily to raise academic standards in Secondary schools, these changes initially led to increased early-school-leaving rates and, to date, have had only minimal impact on students' overall academic engagement and achievement outcomes (Brady, 2006). The lack of realized benefit from this educational reform has stemmed from its focus on such areas as recalibrating graduation requirements and standardizing program delivery structures (Brady, 2006). This has left intact "deeply entrenched organizational structures that establish the parameters of Secondary education" and are oriented to enforcing academic rigour, while largely overlooking the need to improve student engagement (Brady, 2006). In fact, Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere (2004) observed that, in 2001, 37% of 2,650 early school leavers in Ontario were actually meeting or exceeding academic requirements when they decided to terminate their formal education (p.15). Evidently, difficulty in meeting a more demanding academic standard was not the exclusive cause for early school leaving among Ontario's Secondary school students. Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens (2005) similarly found that 50% of early school leavers in their study had achieved a B-average or better prior to leaving. These studies

suggest that academic disengagement may have less to do with curriculum that is overly challenging, and more to do with the fact that students disengage “due to boredom and alienation resulting from an uninteresting and unchallenging environment” (Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005, p. 65). Like those students who shared their vision of an ideal school with educators at the Canadian Education Association, student participants in recent research studies too suggest that efforts to encourage student engagement might constitute a more useful educational tactic than to fixate on mandatory schooling and standardized programming oriented toward rigorous graduation requirements (Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009).

### **Defining Student Engagement**

For the purposes of this research study, the concept of student engagement is understood in the context of Willms, Friesen, & Milton’s (2009) national report on student engagement and effective learning environments. Launched in 2007, this multi-year research report was designed to understand issues around student engagement, and to make recommendations for enhancing the learning experiences of adolescents in classrooms and schools across Canada (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Willms, Friesen & Milton (2009) defined student engagement as “the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning” (p. 7). The first-



year findings of this report were based on data collected from an online survey completed by 32,322 students in 93 schools from 10 school districts across Canada. The survey was designed to measure four dimensions of student engagement and to address five characteristics of the learning environment. The four dimensions of student engagement addressed in the survey were: (1) academic engagement, as indicated by students' attendance and punctuality; (2) intellectual engagement, encompassing students' sense of enjoyment, interest, motivation and relevance of curriculum in language arts classes and mathematics classes; and (3) two domains of social engagement -- students' sense of belonging, and students' participation levels in sports and school clubs. In terms of the perceived quality of the learning environment, the survey addressed five characteristics: (1) effective use of learning time (student perceptions of effective teaching and efficient use of classroom time); (2) teacher/student relations (student perceptions about how teachers treat them); (3) classroom disciplinary climate (extent to which students internalized and conformed to the norms and values of the classroom); (4) expectations for success (student perceptions of the extent to which school staff valued academic achievement and held high expectations for students); and (5) instructional challenge (the extent to which students felt challenged in their language arts and mathematics classes, and how confident they felt in their skill level).

According to Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009), their first-year research results indicated that, in terms of intellectual engagement, levels were significantly lower than the degree of engagement reported in the current

research literature. In mathematics and language arts classes in more than 90 schools across Canada, only 37% of 32,322 students felt intellectually engaged (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). In fact, the research data in their study clearly indicated that intellectual engagement decreased steadily and significantly from Grade 6 to Grade 12, and that the “longer students remain in school, the less likely they [were] to be intellectually engaged” (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009, p 31). These findings underscore a principle that has been made clear in a number of earlier research studies as well; students want Secondary schoolwork that is intellectually engaging and curriculum that is emotionally relevant (Archer, Halsall, Hollingworth, & Mendick, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Davis, Luce-Kapler, & Sumara, 2000; Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2008; Probst, 2004; Spielfhofer, Benton, Evans, Featherstone, Golden, Nelson, & Smith, 2009; Rosenblatt, 2004; Schlechty, 2002).

Absence of intellectual engagement and lack of curriculum relevance for students were also key findings in an Ontario study done by Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens (2005) on early school leavers. Through in-depth interviews, Ferguson et al (2005) determined that one school-related factor in student decisions to leave school early was classroom curriculum that carried no apparent connection to their lives, and was in essence “irrelevant and stagnant” (2005, p. 69). Although other factors contributing to disengagement were found by Ferguson et al (2005), their research findings underscored the key role that curriculum relevance plays in students’ relative sense of intellectual engagement.

The study on early school leaving by Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens (2005) most clearly parts ways with the study on student engagement done by Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009) around the influence that socio-economic status exerts on intellectual engagement. According to Ferguson et al (2005), the best documented correlate of student disengagement and early school leaving in research to date was parental socioeconomic status and social class; quite simply, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were much more likely to become disengaged from the schooling process and to leave without earning a high school diploma than are those students who enjoyed higher socio-economic status. While Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009) concurred with Ferguson et al (2005) that there exists a strong correlation between students' socio-economic status and academic engagement (attendance and punctuality), Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009) drew the added conclusion that higher student socio-economic status among participants in their study did not correlate with higher levels of intellectual engagement. In teasing out institutional variables such as curriculum relevance from macro-level variables such as socio-economic status, they uncovered the apparent phenomenon that socio-economic status may correlate less strongly with student performance in school than earlier research findings seemed to indicate.

In light of research conducted on student engagement to date, for the purposes of this study, inquiry focused primarily on such meso-level variables as curriculum relevance and institutional flexibility. Drawing on Willms, Friesen, & Milton's (2009) newer conceptualization of intellectual engagement, this study

further explored what participants were actually doing in their classrooms, how they felt about their learning experiences, and whether or not they saw their classroom work as contributing meaningfully to their learning.

In assessing intellectual engagement by creatively-inclined students, this study also drew on Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow, which is defined as "the subjective state which people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of losing track of time and of being unaware of fatigue and of everything else but the activity itself" (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997, p.14). According to flow theory, in order for a student to be entirely engaged in a learning activity, there must be a fairly precise match between a student's actual skill level and the level of challenge inherent in a task. Lesser concordance between skill and challenge can result in either boredom or frustration. For example, if a student's skill level is high and the challenge level of an activity is low, boredom results. On the other hand, if the challenge level of an activity is high and the skill level is low, frustration and perhaps anxiety are the outcomes. When skill levels are low and the challenge of the activity is equivalently low, students lack motivation and become indifferent. Thus, only when an activity matches the actual skill level of students in such a way as to carry a challenge perceived as both worthwhile and manageable do student concentration, self-esteem, potency and engagement levels reach their highest. (Csikszentmihalyi , 1997). Since it lends itself admirably to the understanding of creative students' subjective experiences of classroom activities, this study utilizes Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen's (1997) theory of flow to

understand student levels of engagement or disengagement in their transitioning to Grade Nine.

Similarly, in his examination of motivation in the workplace, Pink (2009) emphasized the crucial role intellectual engagement plays in terms of keeping workers motivated. Drawing on the work of Sauerman & Cohen (2008), he noted their research findings indicating that desire for intellectual engagement was the best predictor of productivity among 11,000 study participants who worked as scientists and engineers at companies across the United States. According to Pink, one source of frustration in the workplace was the mismatch between skill and ability: “When what they must do falls short of their capabilities, the result is boredom” (2009, p. 119). Like Secondary school students, adults want work that is intellectually engaging. Thus the role of intellectual engagement in keeping students motivated during their transition year was addressed in this research study as well.

### **Students at Risk**

In profiling students at risk, Canadian research to date has also tended to focus on such macro-level variables as socio-economic status and minority group status (Audas & Willms, 2001; Bowlby, 2005; Frempong & Willms, 2002, Jenson, 2001; Levin, 2004). While such non-school related variables are important indicators, risk factors to be examined in this study will concentrate on such meso-level factors as classroom climate and institutional flexibility. Based on in-depth interviews with early school leavers, Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens (2005) interestingly observe that the early school leavers in their study

generally exhibited a greater need for autonomy, and were much less socially conforming than were their more successful peers. In explicating the impact such tendencies might have on student outcomes at the Secondary school level, they suggest that “compared to Elementary school classrooms, early high school classrooms usually place more emphasis on teacher control and discipline, and provide less opportunity for student decision-making, choice or self-management” (66). Thus, students who are inherently less socially conforming may exhibit classroom behaviours that are more likely to lead to school suspensions and eventually to school expulsion. In fact, Ferguson et al (2005) go so far as to surmise that “most leavers are conceptualized by teachers as socially and academically lacking, with deficient values and attitudes toward education” (p. 69). Their conclusions correspond with those of Field & Olafson (1999), who make the case that educational institutions tend to place blame for academic failure squarely on students’ shoulders, rather than to examine the role that institutional factors may have played in those negative outcomes.

In order to understand the dynamics of resiliency in students at risk, therefore, it seems essential to take situational factors into account. Several recent studies have opted to concentrate on the complex interaction between individuals and their environments, instead of considering only the unique personality traits of at-risk youth (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Prince-Embury, 2008). Case studies have allowed researchers to understand that individual attributes such as non-conformity and resiliency are highly contextual in the way they play out. In their discussion of

resilience, for example, Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) identified six models of resilience found in the literature to date: compensatory model, protective factor model, protective-stabilizing model, protective-reactive model, challenging model and inoculation model. According to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), compensatory models rely on the assumption that a risk factor can be compensated for by co-existing protective factors that counteract or neutralize the negative effects of the risk factor. In protective factor models, assets or resources are seen as moderating influences and are able to shield the individual from the influence of a given risk factor. The third model of resilience noted in the literature to date – the protective-stabilizing model – is based on the idea that although there is no direct relationship between the risk and the outcome when a protective factor is absent, protective factors are able to neutralize the effects of the risk outcome when present in a situation. In a protective-reactive model of resilience, on the other hand, according to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), there is understood to exist a direct correlation between a risk factor and an outcome; however, risk factors are never completely removed by protective factors. In the challenge model of resilience, “the association between a risk factor and an outcome is curvilinear” (p. 404) which suggests that, when adolescents are exposed to a low level of risk, they are able to overcome it but, when exposed to a level of risk that is too high, negative effects may become insurmountable. The inoculation model is similar to the challenge model but takes into account a longitudinal aspect as well, in that “repeated exposures to compensatory, protective, and/or challenge processes prepare adolescents for dealing with

adversities in the future” (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005, p. 404). In considering all these models, however, the inherent complexity of the quality of resilience is underscored. Thus, rather than to narrowly describe participants in this study as lacking resilience, exacerbating factors were identified from the research data so as to understand more sensitively how these creatively-inclined adolescents managed their first year of high school.

Ungar (2004) in his postmodern interpretation of resilience and troubled youth made the case that resilience is a societal construct in much the same way that deviance is a societal construct. According to Ungar (2004), to label a student who has refused to conform to institutional norms as deviant, rather than as resilient, is to overlook the meaning that she or he has constructed for her or his life, and for the contexts in which she or he lives. For many students, behaviour patterns attributed to non-conformity and even deviance can readily be re-framed as “healthy adaptations that permit them to survive unhealthy circumstances” (Ungar, 2004, p. 6). Thus, for Ungar (2004), it is imperative that caregivers or service providers, who wish to understand why adolescents choose the behaviours they do, develop the attitude of humility required to listen to students and to establish for them a safe space in which to speak and to be heard.

This study too was structured around the understanding and conviction that all students – including those who are at risk – are active meaning-makers and have worthwhile stories to tell. Educators need to respect both the genres of literacy that adolescents create and the contexts in which they feel most



comfortable (Friere, 1994; Lesley, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2004). In keeping with these principles, this study invited students to share their stories directly with the primary researcher, in personal interview settings and by providing researcher access to their personal multi-modal journals.

## **Transitions**

The many hurdles that students in general and students at risk in particular encounter as they transition from middle school to high school have been an area of intense investigation in the United States and in the United Kingdom and, as a result, have been well documented in the research to date (Evans, George, White, & Sharp, 2010; Lipps, 2005; McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Seifert & Schultz, 2007; Turner, 2007). According to Lipps (2005), however, there has been surprisingly little research that looks specifically at how Canadian youth transition from Elementary school to Secondary school. It also appears that Grade Nine is a key year for young persons, in that most reach a decision to either “continue their school experience or drop out soon after they enter high school” (Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Furthermore, although early school leavers most frequently cite psychosocial issues as reasons for their disengagement and early leaving, most studies which examine the transition into Secondary school have focused on academic performance rather than on psychological correlates (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Meluish, Sammons, &

Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Turner, 2007). Understanding the psychosocial aspects of that critically important Grade Nine transition year is a critical aspect of this study.

A number of research studies to date have used stage-environmental fit theories to explain the stress that adolescents encounter in their transitioning from Elementary to Secondary school (Eccles, Midgely, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993). According to this logic, when changes in a school environment do not match an adolescent's developmental needs and capabilities, negative psychological outcomes will be experienced. For example, as young persons develop a need for greater independence and autonomy, they require learning environments that entail less teacher-led instruction and relatively more opportunity for independent learning. Individuals whose developmental needs for autonomy and independence are not met in the school environment will experience "negative motivational outcomes" and "decreased identification with school, and increased propensity to drop out of school" (Lipps, 2005). The research findings of Ferguson, Tilliczek, Boydell, & Rummens (2005) similarly support a stage-environmental fit perspective when they observe that "the natural inclination for autonomy found in all youth of this developmental stage, combined with a view of the classroom as being controlling and limiting of their choices, can impact on behaviours and levels of motivation, and consequently lead to early school leaving" (66). Thus, an important focus in this study as well has been on understanding to what extent participants experienced their classroom environments as being suited to their developmental needs for independence and autonomy. This inquiry yielded further important data

concerning the needs of creatively-inclined at-risk youth in their transition from Elementary to Secondary school.

Further insight into the transition needs of creatively-inclined students who are at risk for academic failure was derived from workplace research by DiVittis (2010). According to DiVittis, the concept of onboarding has emerged in the Human Resource Development lexicon during the past decade to describe the strategic planning needed to effectively facilitate the transition of a new member into an organization. The research literature around how to organize support and resources to optimize onboarding procedures has recognized that such strategies must address both the intellectual and emotional needs of individuals experiencing workplace transitions (Dai & Meuse, 2007; DiVittis, 2010; Watkins, 2003). This study has similarly adapted a dual focus on the intellectual engagement needs and social interaction strategies of the creatively-inclined participants who are in the process of transitioning into Grade Nine.

Properly implemented in the workplace setting, onboarding goes well beyond standard orientation models that briefly point out the logistics of an organization. In fact, the onboarding process may continue for months and may even address such issues as the social networking needs of a new hiree. According to Watkins (2003), “Like swimming, transitioning is a teachable skill and therefore transition acceleration skills should be taught to people who are in transition, so that talented people do not drown unnecessarily” (p. 7). Following similar logic, transition strategies that schools may put in place to support the

unique transition needs of creatively-inclined Grade Nine students have been summarized as an integrated discussion that forms part of this research study.

### **Adolescent Development**

One paradox of adolescent development noted by several research studies on adolescent brain development in the past decade was that, although adolescence is a time of increased physical strength and mental capabilities, it is also a time that marks a sharp increase in morbidity and mortality rates (Dahl, 2004; Luna, 2009; Steinberg, 2008; Walsh, 2006). In addressing this paradox, one line of research has used anatomical magnetic resonance imaging to map brain development in children and adolescents (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Giedd, Blumenthal, Jeffries, Castellanos, Liu, Zijdenbos, Paus, Evans & Rapoport, 1999; Lenroot & Giedd, 2006; Luna, 2009; Paus, 2006). Key findings to date suggest that the adolescent brain continues to develop well beyond childhood, and that the remodeling of gray and white matter in the brain continues even into the third decade of life (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Lenroot & Giedd, 2006). According to Walsh (2006), an important aspect of brain development that continues through adolescence takes place in the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain responsible for considering consequences, weighing choices and making decisions. Because the prefrontal cortex of the brain has yet to fully develop, in some respects, early adolescents are developmentally incapable of fully appreciating the long-term outcomes of their decisions. Anecdotally as well, adolescents are understood to be poor at decision-making where risk is involved. In a research study, Baird, Fugelsang, & Bennett (2005)

used magnetic resonance imaging to examine differences in decision-making between adolescents and adults (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). They discovered that adolescents took significantly longer than adults to determine that risky scenarios, such as swimming with sharks, would be a “not good idea”. This inability to formulate appropriate strategies puts adolescents at huge risk in terms of the choices they make, and may explain in part the sharp increase in mortality rates among this age group.

Another important revelation originating from neuroscientific research into adolescent brain development has to do with the way adolescents uniquely experience life events. Traditionally, it had been assumed that experiences in early childhood would have greater impact on behaviour than would experiences later in life (Kolb, 2000). However, in his research on the effect of experience on rats, Kolb (2000) made the case that “experience changes the adolescent brain – as well as the very young brain – differently than the adult brain.” He suggested that, although these anatomical changes are so complex that it is difficult to determine exactly how the brain is changed by an external event, it was nevertheless clear that “apparently identical experiences can have profoundly different effects on the brain at different times.”

Complexity learning theories are likewise based on the idea that the brain is a complex organism that is actually anatomically changed by what it encounters and experiences (Davis, Luce-Kapler, & Sumara, 2000). In this comparatively interactive and dynamic model of learning, adolescent learners are cognitively altered by meaningful learning experiences (Arthur, Campbell, Stairs,

& Watson, 2007). In their thirty-year study of 180 participants from infancy to adulthood, Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, and Collins (2005) also draw on complexity theory as a way to understand human development and learning. Their view is that, since the adolescent brain is a dynamic and maturing organism that is actually changed by the events it experiences, human development essentially consists of a sequence of gradual increases in complexity of biological organization (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). This perspective traces a dynamic and dialogic relationship between adolescents and the experiences they encounter. Thus, one aspect of this present study was to better understand the long-term developmental implications of life events encountered in the first year of high school, and of how those experiences were likely to permanently alter or shape the young adolescent as an individual.

### **Value of Arts Education**

Few would question that creativity in all aspects of education is essential to the fostering of innovation, and that creative design in industry is crucial to survival in a global economy. Notwithstanding, the current emphasis on standardized testing in schools across Canada and the United States proclaims that creativity continues to be undervalued in Western school systems (Chomsky, 2000; Eisner, 1979; Friere, 2003; Greene, 1995; Macedo, 2000). According to Eisner (1979), one of the formative influences on schools has been the social force of scientism, or the “faith in measured performance and so-called procedures for evaluating schooling and appraising competence” (p. 24). Greene (1995) also maintained that standards, assessment, outcomes and achievement

“are the currency of educational discussion today” (p. 9). This belief in test scores can be clearly seen in the implementation of standardized testing in Secondary schools across Canada and the United States. Macedo (2000) contended that the United States’ educational system is generally not one that encourages independent thought and critical thinking. In fact, according to Macedo, education’s major objective is to “de-skill” students, preparing them to “walk unreflectively through a labyrinth of procedures and techniques” (p. 2). As teachers prepare their students for standardized tests, which Macedo saw as the government’s way to “reassert their control over the curriculum” (p.4), education becomes characterized by a series of mindless and meaningless drills devoid of critical thinking. As a way to prepare students for standardized tests, teachers emphasize the mechanical learning and memorization of facts while sacrificing creativity and critical thinking (Eisner, 1998; Macedo, 2000; Greene, 1995; Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000).

According to Davis, Luce-Kapler, and Sumara (2000), standardized testing seems to promote the more teacher-centred practices of the past. In a classroom where emphasis is on form and mechanics as opposed to creative thinking, learning becomes a process of “taking things in”, grasping ideas”, building solid foundations” and “dealing with cold, hard facts” (p. 61). In such an environment, students come to depend on the teacher for their learning, while content is organized into separate bits that can be readily administered by the teacher to the student. A similar analysis of the Western education system was expressed by Freire (2003) who maintained that the process of education is widely

presumed to operate on a banking model, in which students are passive depositories and teachers function as active depositors. Knowledge, under such a model of education, becomes a “gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire, 2003, p. 72). Implicit in the banking analogy was a presumption that the learner is fundamentally a spectator, “not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher” (Freire, 2003, p. 80). It follows, however, that the more thoroughly students accept the passivity of their roles as spectators, the less they tend to be able to develop creatively (Freire, 2003; Chomsky, 2000).

In commenting on the relegation of students to roles as spectators, Chomsky (2000) borrowed Walter Lipman’s term, “the bewildered herd.” As he saw it, “[t]he large majority of people, ‘the bewildered herd’, are to function in our democracy as ‘spectators’, not as ‘participants in action’ (Chomsky, 2000, p. 22). Such a model of education is clearly antithetical to notions of imaginative thinking as a critical instrument of change and improvement. Given the undervaluing of creativity and divergent thinking in Western education generally, it is important to examine and understand how creative students manage to navigate the recently standardized curriculum in Ontario Secondary schools.

### **The Study of Creativity**

As an area of research, the investigation of creativity did not begin to grow until the 1950’s (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Albert & Runco, 2009). Early studies tended to characterize creativity primarily as a mental process associated with



certain personality types; creativity was de-contextualized, and robbed of crucial environmental influences (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Lubart, 2009; Montuori & Purser, 1995). Seen in such a way, creativity is thought of as a fixed characteristic that one either possesses or does not possess. It thus follows that, to understand creativity, it is necessary to study and understand those individuals who possess it. More contemporary theories of creativity spring from a systems approach that regards creativity, not only as a psychological event but also as a cultural and social event (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Feldman, 2009). When creativity is thus understood as part of a larger system, then to develop creativity becomes an issue of providing and nourishing a context for creative development and expression (Spooner, 2002). To regard the roots of creativity in this light is to quickly recognize how crucial it is for an educational system to cultivate creativity in its student body.

In their 5-year study of over 200 talented adolescents, Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1997) identify important roles that both families and schools play in the influence of creative development. According to Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1997), because it is impossible to change the inborn gifts and talents of children, and because it is difficult to alter the cultural and societal parameters that affect the unfolding of talent, it is therefore important to focus on the elements of the equation over which there is some control. In keeping with that recommendation, this study focused primarily on the contributions that teachers and schools can make to adolescents' creative development.

Like Friere (2003), Eisner (1987) and Greene (1995), Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1997) were harsh in their criticism of today's standardized curriculum. Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1997) argued that in a standardized Secondary school curriculum, the teacher's role is reduced to that of an "information technician" whose responsibility it is to transmit considerable quantities of information to large groups of students in a relatively short period of time (p. 178). An emphasis on performance standards combined with a focus on uniform delivery does not allow for the slow cultivation of an individual learner's talents (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997). According to Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, (1997), in order for creativity to occur, students require learning activities that provide *flow* – the opportunity for a student to become wholeheartedly engaged in an activity. Classroom teachers who are pressured to meet all required curriculum expectations as well as to engineer a rise in students' standardized test scores are understandably apprehensive of learning activities that, while they may provide a state of flow, are not guaranteed to improve test scores. As a result, students who are creatively inclined but who are not offered opportunities to engage in creative pursuits in the classroom may be at increased risk for disengagement from the schooling process. To date, however, little research has asked creatively-inclined students how well their experiences in the classroom have met their need for creative expression (Spooner, 2002). It was a focus of this study to provide students with opportunities to share their stories of whether or not learning

activities provided in their classrooms promoted and helped to develop their creative flow.

### **Creativity and the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking**

The psychometric study of creativity began in earnest after J.P. Guilford's 1950 American Psychological Association (APA) Presidential Address, which was in essence a call for a more scientific study of creativity (Plucker & Renzuli, 1999). Twenty-five years following Guilford's address, the study of creativity was heavily influenced by and "conducted under the aegis of the psychometric perspective" (Plucker & Renzuli, 1999, p. 36). Although psychometric testing today is often criticized for over-simplifying the complex creative process, Plucker and Renzuli (1999) have defended psychometric tests such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT). According to Plucker and Renzulli, the TTCT was based on an understanding of creativity as the ability to think divergently, in contrast with earlier views of creativity as a personality trait that one either did or did not possess.

As an assessment tool designed to measure one's potential for creative thought, the TTCT continues to be widely used by school personnel across North America and around the world (Kaufman, Plucker, & Baer, 2008; Wechsler, 2006). The TTCT has been positively recognized as the most researched and analyzed creativity measurement to date, and is often commended for its ease of administration (Swartz, 1988; Johnson & Fishkin, 1999; Kim, 2006, Wechsler, 2006). The test-retest reliability for the TTCT is also deemed well within the acceptable range, considering both the complexity of creativity thinking itself and

differences in participant motivation which could conceivably affect measurement of one's creative function (Treffinger, 1985). In terms of its validity, Cramond, Matthews-Morgan, Bandalos, & Zuo (2005) commented specifically on the strong predictive validity of the TTCT and advocate use for its original purpose – to assess creative potential in at-risk students whose creative strengths may be hidden. There have been a number of studies affirming the predictive validity of the TTCT. One longitudinal study, in which elementary students were given the test in 1958 and then contacted to assess their creative accomplishments 40 years later, convincingly demonstrated the validity of the TTCT for predicting creative achievement in individuals (Cramond, Matthews-Morgan, Bandalos, & Zuo, 2005). It is also important to note that the manual used to score and interpret TTCT results includes norm tables which are updated periodically and are conveniently organized by grade level (kindergarten through Grade 12). Based on a sample size of 55,600, the most current norm tables included students from central, northeastern, southeastern and western regions of the United States, as well as from Canada (Kim, 2006). Thus, although the TTCT was developed primarily in the United States, it is norm-referenced for Canada as well and thus was deemed valid for the participants in this study.

Given its long research history, its ease of administration, its documented reliability, its highly predictive validity, its appropriateness for Canada's Secondary school students and the strong commendations it has been given as a tool for assessing creative potential, the TTCT was selected for the purpose of identifying creatively-inclined student participants in this study.

## **Creative Adolescents and Identity Formation**

As education centres where children begin to formulate views of self and of how they fit into society, schools have a critical role to play in terms of adolescent identity formation (Orvin, 1995; Steinberg, 2007). Identity formation, according to Erikson's life stages theory, is achieved one step at a time. Development of a coherent identity was seen as a fundamental psychosocial task of adolescence (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In their attempt to establish a clear sense of who they are, adolescents engage in a series of role rehearsals (Lesko, 2001; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins, 2005; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Ungar, 2004). As early as their first year of Secondary school, students seem to practice these roles as they spontaneously divide themselves into social categories (Watson, 2005). These role rehearsals provide students with valuable understandings needed to construct their ultimate identities. The school community fulfills an important function in influencing identity formation by establishing an emotionally safe environment in which students can explore who they are.

Dweck (2007), in addressing the issue of raising talented children, argued for a view of talent as a work in progress, or as she termed it – a growth mind set. Children possessing a self-theory based on a view of their talent as being a fixed entity or in finite supply tend to focus on demonstrating their present level of talent rather than on further developing it (Dweck, 2007). By contrast, those students who hold a self-theory based on a view of their talent as a resource that can be developed incrementally with effort, according to Dweck, are much more

likely to be motivated to do so. Thus, participants' views of self and their concepts of talent and creativity together provided another important focus in this research investigation into how creatively-inclined at-risk students experienced and managed their first year of high school.

Creative students as well need safe learning environments in which to develop their identities as artists, mathematicians, athletes, scientists, writers or musicians. Ironically, however, persons who are likely to be innovative often are also more likely "to have personalities that favour breaking rules and early experiences that make them want to do so" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 327). Nevertheless, in the school setting, a teacher may well represent the first encounter a creatively-inclined student experiences with an adult associated with a particular area of creativity and it is these encounters that provide students with crucial information about the kind of adult the student may someday wish to be (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997). Part of the focus of this present research study was to provide students, who are at risk for disengagement, with opportunities to discuss if and how their learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom have provided them with occasions to see themselves as creative individuals developing their skills as artists, athletes, scientists, mathematicians, writers or musicians.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

I am one of you and being one of you  
Is being and knowing what I am and know.

Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,  
Since in my sight, you see the earth again.

Stevens (1972)

The American poet Wallace Stevens (1951) envisioned the role of the poet as someone who “helps people to live their lives” (p. 30). It is the poet who “creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it” and, by thus creating it, allows us to see it in a fresh way (pp. 30-31). Greene (1973) sees the teacher as someone who also “generates a variety of symbolic structures so that he (as he expects his students to do) can look from different angles on his life-world” (p. 11). For Greene (1973), the teacher’s objective is “to free himself as well as those he teaches to explore consciousness and the life-world” (p. 139). The teacher, much like that of the poet, helps students “To take a stranger’s vantage point on everyday reality” and to “look inquiringly and wonderingly on the world in which one lives” (Greene, 1973, p. 267). According to Miller (2010), however, Greene, in her later years, expanded her original notions of the teacher as a necessary angel to one who also embraces “a range of differing experiences and interpretations of the lived lives of women, immigrants, newcomers, and strangers” (136). In *The Dialectics of Freedom*, Greene (1988), pointed out the deficits in notions of individual freedom and focused instead on the richness in plurality. In such a view, students too become necessary angels – for it is in their stories that we as educators and researchers

come to see the world anew. If we are able to create spaces in which students feel safe enough to claim their right to speak, we create an opportunity for ourselves to hear true words that have the potential to transform the worlds in which we live. It is this belief in students as necessary angels that has permeated the methodology selected in this research study. As untapped repositories of educational insight, participants have valuable contributions to make, in terms of understanding what works in classrooms today. It was participants' voices and written words that informed this study and the theoretical statements generated here have been grounded in the very ideas that the participants have put forward concerning their experiences as creative students navigating their first year in high school.

### **Summary of Research Inquiry**

Creatively-inclined students who are disengaged from the schooling process may be at increased risk in a standardized classroom curriculum. Little research has asked how creatively-inclined students fare in a standardized curriculum. This research investigation was designed to elicit and characterize the transition strategies adopted by creatively-inclined students as they manage their entry year (Grade Nine) of Secondary school.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

- How do creatively-inclined students navigate a standardized curriculum?
- What transition strategies do they employ to make their first year of high school successful?
- How do creative activities make a difference in social/academic life?



## **Rationale for Grounded Theory**

The methodology and procedures selected for this study were based in part on Waterman's (1988) astute observation that, "if you want to know what someone is thinking, ask them" (p. 196). They were also based on Freire's (2003) belief in problem-posing education whereby "the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the students" (p. 80-81). In Freire's re-framing of the teacher/student relationship, the student becomes a "critical co-investigator in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire, 2003, p. 81). The participants in this study too were seen as "critical co-investigators" and as I, the researcher, presented questions for their consideration, the participants' responses urged me to re-consider my earlier considerations. The fundamental belief system that has determined the structure of this study was the conviction that, "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (Freire, 2003, p. 88). An important component of that belief system was a deep appreciation for and a confidence in the dialogic nature of language and words. Words, in fact are not neutral, but "populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others"; they exist in "other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions" (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 294). Uncovering those intentions and understanding those contexts was, thus, an important aspect of the data analysis component of this study. Knowledge, after all, "emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 2003, p. 72)

A grounded theory study, as Strauss and Corbin (2008) explained it, is a study in which the researcher generates theoretical statements or a visual schema of a phenomenon – a theory that explains some action, interaction or process. This is accomplished primarily through collecting interview data, making multiple trips to the research sites, attempting to develop and interrelate categories of information and creating a context-specific theory. A purposeful selection of participants who are able to advance the development of the theory as well as the interplay between data-gathering and data-analysis is another distinguishing feature of grounded theory studies. In essence, the theory generated in this study has been solidly grounded in the data collected – which has included transcriptions of in-depth interviews as well as descriptive content analyses of participants' multi-modal journals and semester-end provincial report cards. Two integrated models have also been created to better demonstrate how the creatively-inclined participants in this study managed their entry year of high school. These models include both protective factors for participants who were at low risk for academic failure and exacerbating factors for participants who were at high risk for academic failure. The transition strategies that each group of creatively-inclined participants chose in order to make that first year successful is also outlined in the integrated models.

### **Evaluating Grounded Theory**

There are a number of reasons for selecting grounded theory as the methodology best suited to address the research questions put forth in this study. For example, a grounded theory approach is warranted when theories to explain

participants' behaviours are not available or the existing theories are inaccurate or biased (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although research on student engagement has considered such meso-level variables as curriculum relevance and institutional flexibility, little research has focused on creatively-inclined Grade Nine students specifically to examine how they feel about their learning experiences at the Secondary level and whether or not they see their classroom work contributing meaningfully to their learning. More typically educational institutions were found to characteristically attribute lack of academic success to individual students' personal attributes and character traits, rather than to features of the institutional setting itself (Field & Olafson, 1999). A grounded theory approach has been implemented to probe and uncover system-based factors that contribute to disengagement and risk for academic failure among creatively-inclined students in Ontario's Secondary schools.

A grounded theory approach is also warranted when a detailed view is required and the research questions can only be addressed from the lived experience of the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2002; Glasser & Strauss, 2008; Myers, 1997; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997; Urquhart, 2001). Research studies indicate that students who are at risk for early school leaving are often blamed for their behaviours (Ferguson et al, 2005; Henriksson, 2008; Field & Olafson, 1999). This study is designed to understand the lived experience of students at risk and to provide them with multiple opportunities to share their stories. It is crucial that we as educators and researchers come to know "through dialogue with them both their *objective* situation and their *awareness* of that

situation – the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist” (Freire, 2003, p. 95). It is only then that we can begin to comprehend how we ourselves need to change.

Ways in which the school system may need to adapt in order to address the learning needs of creatively-inclined students who are at risk for academic failure in Grade Nine are outlined in the discussion segment of this paper. As part of this discussion, an integrated model for transitioning creative students at risk has been developed, and offers guidance for educators who recognize the need to support and engage these creatively-inclined at-risk students.

### **Methodology/Procedures**

For the present inquiry, a grounded theory research design was selected, within which a modified ethnographic approach (which included in-depth interviews, a content analysis of participants’ multi-modal journals and semester-end provincial report cards) was implemented as a way to generate data. During the study period of eight weeks, Grade Nine student participants (n=12) were each asked to take part in beginning and ending interview sessions. Adequacy of sample size was determined in part based on recommendations made by Cresswell (2002) and by Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) that a minimal sample size of 3-5 participants is sufficient for case study research. It has also been argued that, since the aim of grounded theory methodology is to develop conceptual categories, small sample sizes and limited data do not pose research integrity problems (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1994; Stern, 1994). However, the research sample was drawn from an at-risk adolescent population and participants had the right to drop out of the study at any point. Moreover, some

participants might prove unable or unwilling to commit to all components of the research study. Thus, a sample size of 12 participants was selected. Also since the participants were initially selected based on their own self-identification as being creatively-inclined, an initial sample size of 12 participants would allow for the fact that some of the participants who self-identified as being creatively-inclined might not meet the objective criteria for creative thinking aptitudes as identified by their TTCT scores.

Participants were also to keep a multi-modal response journal of their day-to-day activities over two weeks. The model for participant journaling was drawn in part from Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen's (1997) study in which participants kept track of their levels of engagement in day-to-day activities by completing an Experience Sampling Form each time an electronic pager signaled them to do so. Although electronic pagers were not involved in this case, participants in my study were encouraged to carry their journals to class and to jot down their experiences and any associated feelings during each day. Participant journaling as a data collection strategy was also based on an understanding of the writing process as being inherently dialogic (Bakhtin, 1998; Richardson, 2000; Walshe, 1987). Whenever writers are encouraged to respond to what they themselves have written and to dialogue with their own ideas, an opportunity is presented to process their experiences anew and in different ways (Hatch, 2002; Probst, 2004; Richardson, 2000; Rosenblatt, 2004) The inclusion of journal writing as a data collection strategy was further based on the belief that adolescents have worthwhile things to say and need an opportunity to speak

their truths (Davis, Luce-Kapler, & Sumara, 2000; Freire, 2003, Greene, 1995; hooks, 2003).

The multi-modal journals contained both lined and blank pages, thus allowing participants to respond by means of images, words or both. Participants were told that the journal entries could include: quotations; photographs; artwork; cartoons; song lyrics; personal schedules; childhood memories; opinions; descriptive and/or narrative writing; commentary on school life and/or family life and/or part-time jobs; future plans and ambitions; and/or immediate concerns and fears. Participants were also encouraged to include Facebook status updates, Facebook wall postings and telephone text messages in their journals. Facebook is an online social networking site that allows participants to post status updates concerning where they are, what they are doing or how they are feeling. As a social networking site, Facebook also allows participants to post messages on each other's individualized online writing spaces or walls (within Facebook). The decision to invite status updates and text messages was based on the principle that adolescents are active meaning makers and that educators need to respect both the genres of literacy that adolescents create and the contexts in which they feel most comfortable (Lesley, 2008; Rosenblatt, 2004).

Participants were also asked to complete a standardized assessment, *The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* (TTCT) that is designed to measure aptitudes as creative thinkers. The TTCT was selected based on a review of the current literature concerning the TTCT which authenticated its relevancy, its validity and its reliability. The TTCT was also a product of choice because it was

relatively easy to administer, was appropriate for this population and included a manual for scoring and interpreting the results that was complete with an in-depth scoring guide, sample answers and norm tables organized by grade level.

Data from the interviews, multimodal journals, TTCT results, provincial report card results and teacher comments were then collated and analyzed to generate theoretical models with the purpose of systematizing the complex factors affecting the qualities of “resilience” and/or being “at-risk” and/or being “creatively inclined” as Grade Nine students in Ontario high schools.

The research study was conducted in two stages. Phase I encompassed the recruitment process and involved the selection of participants (April 2010). Volunteers (n = 28) from among twelve Grade Nine classes in three Southeastern Ontario Secondary schools were asked to complete a survey (see Appendix A). Based on Brace’s (2004) criteria for survey question design, a survey was created that included a series of close-ended “I” statements and a balanced 5-point rating scale. The survey was used as a way to help participants self-identify as being both creatively-inclined and involved in social networking while also having low levels of academic engagement. The decision to ask students to self-identify as being creatively-inclined was based in part on research findings indicating that teachers tend to be unduly conservative in their ratings of students’ creativity and might be prone to inadvertently overlook suitable creatively-inclined candidates (Cropley, 1992; Lau & Li, 1996; Torrance, 1987; Runco, 2007). As for the issue of asking teachers to identify individuals who were at-risk for academic failure, it seemed unfair to students to make them

aware that teachers held such an uncomplimentary view of their prospects. Since the multi-modal journal was planned to include information from social networking sites, students were asked on the survey to indicate their levels of participation in social networking. The survey also included a self-report measure of participants' involvement in art, music, creative writing, journaling, drawing and/or painting; this was based on the Creative Behaviours Inventory (CBI) taken from Runco (1987) and Saunders Wickes, & Ward (2005).

Students ( $n = 14$ ) who completed the survey and registered low levels of school engagement while simultaneously identifying themselves as both creative and involved in Internet social networking were contacted directly. Of the 28 participants who completed the survey, 26 were female. One of the two males who self-identified as being creatively inclined with both low levels of school engagement and high levels of engagement in social networking was contacted for the study but declined participation. One of the 13 females contacted to participate also declined. Thus, a purposeful sample ( $n = 12$ ) of females was selected from among those volunteers who expressed willingness to remain committed for the balance of the semester.

Phase II of the research process consisted of a modified ethnographic study which entailed transcription and analysis of two sets of one-on-one interviews as well as a content analysis of journals and student report cards. The first set of interviews took place a month after the mid-term report cards were issued in Semester Two of the participants' Grade Nine year (May 2010). Since timelines were short, the first two interview sessions were to be combined into



one session. Also at the end of the first interview session, participants were asked to stay to complete *The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*. Before participants left the first interview session, they were also provided with hard-covered notebooks to use as multi-modal journals. Participants were asked to use these to keep track of their day-to-day activities for two weeks, and then to submit the completed journals when they attended their concluding interview sessions, slated at the end of Semester Two and after participants had completed their final exams (June 2010).

### **PHASE I – Recruitment Process and Sample Selection**

When ethics approval from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB # 10-003) was granted, written permission from the Research Advisory Committee of the research site school board (a public school board in southwestern Ontario) was requested and received. Secondary school Principals were first formally notified by the Accountability and Assessment Officer of the site board and then the recruitment process could officially begin. School board permission was finalized only days before March Break and three weeks before administration of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Initially, there was no response from any Secondary school Principals. The Accountability and Assessment Officer was contacted and it was suggested by him that given the imminence of the OSSLT, it was conceivable that Principals might not respond until after it had been administered.

As a teacher in a Section 23 program<sup>1</sup> in the site school board, I approached my own school administrator and asked her to make some inquiries with her colleagues on my behalf. She willingly did so and was able to provide the names of four Principals who might be interested in accommodating the study. She suggested that I email these Principals directly and send them a copy of my research proposal. Three of the four Principals responded affirmatively and provided me with the names of teachers in their schools who would allow me to present the research study opportunity to their Grade Nine students. However, each of the school administrators did ask that the proposed Grade Nine information sessions not be held until after the administration of the OSSLT (April 8, 2010).

Once the OSSLT date was past, I was allotted a 75-minute time frame in each school to make presentations to Grade Nine classes. A ten-minute information session was held in each of four Grade Nine classrooms in three Secondary schools, which included: Secondary School A – a large urban high school; Secondary School B – another large urban high school; Secondary School C – a large rural high school in a small town. Information sessions were held in the following Grade Nine classes: Secondary School A – Girls Open-level Physical and Health Education (1), Academic-level Science (1), Open-level Family Studies (1), Academic-level English (1); Secondary School B – Essential-level English (1), Applied-level English (1), Academic-level English (2); and

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<sup>1</sup> Section 23 classrooms are part of an education program designed for students in Ontario who are in government-approved, care and/or treatment, custody and correctional facilities.

Secondary School C – Open-level Instrumental Music (1), Academic-level French (1), Applied-level Science (1), Academic-level Science (1).

During each ten-minute presentation, Grade Nine students were presented with a brief overview of the intended research. They were told that voluntarily completed surveys would be used to determine which candidates were suitable for the actual study. At the end of each presentation, students were invited to take a copy of an information package which included the following: the Letter of Information (Appendix B); the Parental Consent Form (Appendix C); the Survey for High School Students in Grade Nine (Appendix A); and the Survey Assent Form (Appendix D). Interested students who chose to take an information package home were asked to discuss it with parents/guardians. Having obtained parent/guardian signatures on the Parental Consent Forms, students were asked to complete the survey and sign the Survey Assent Forms. They were then to seal the signed consent forms and completed surveys into the addressed envelopes provided. The sealed envelopes were to be placed in a bold-coloured file folder, provided by the researcher and placed on the teacher's desk. Classroom teachers were asked to collect the sealed envelopes and send them through the school board's internal courier, no later than eight school days after the in-class information sessions.

Although there was excellent student response in each classroom, as demonstrated by the number of information packages distributed to students who indicated interest in the study through a show of hands ( $n = 172$ ), the actual

number of completed surveys returned to me within the eight-day timeline was substantially lower (n = 28).

### **SURVEY RESULTS (*Table 3.1*)**

<b>SECONDARY SCHOOL A (n = 6)</b>				
<b>Gender &amp; Grade Nine Subject – Course Level</b>	<b>Computer Use &amp; Social Networking</b> Statements 1-7	<b>Participation &amp; Performance at School</b> Statements 8-11	<b>Creativity</b> Statements 12-16	<b>Social Relationships at School</b> Statements 17-18
<b>Note:</b> Names are pseudonyms				
Female Science – Academic	1.5	2	1	1
<b>Female* (Gail)</b> <b>Science – Academic</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Female* (Ally)</b> <b>Science – Academic</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Female Science – Academic	3	2	2	1
<b>Female* (Lee)</b> <b>Science – Academic</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>2</b>
Male French – Applied	3.5	2.5	2.5	2
Female French – Applied	1.5	2	1.5	1
<b>Female* (Rita)</b> <b>French – Applied</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Female French – Applied	3.5	1	2.5	1.5
<b>Female* (Shelly)</b> <b>English – Academic</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Female English – Academic	1.5	2	1	1.5
Female English – Academic	2.5	1	1	1
Female English – Academic	2	2	1	2.5
Female English – Academic	1	2	2	2
<b>Female* (Nicky)</b> <b>English – Academic</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.5</b>
Female English – Academic	2	2.5	2.5	1

SECONDARY SCHOOL B (n = 2)				
Gender & Grade Nine Subject – Course Level	Computer Use & Social Networking Statements 1-7	Participation & Performance at School Statements 8-11	Creativity Statements 12-16	Social Relationships at School Statements 17-18
<b>Note:</b> Names are pseudonyms				
<b>Female* (Anna)</b> English – Academic	2	3.5	3	3.5
<b>Female* (Alexis)</b> English – Applied	1.5	2	1	1
Female English – Applied	1.5	1	2	1.5
Female* English - Applied	1	2	2.5	1
SECONDARY SCHOOL C (n = 4)				
Gender & Grade Nine Subject – Course Level	Computer Use & Social Networking Statements 1-7	Participation & Performance at School Statements 8-11	Creativity Statements 12-16	Social Relationships at School Statements 17-18
<b>Note:</b> Names are pseudonyms				
Female* Science – Applied	2	2.5	2	1
Male* Science – Applied	2.5	3.5	2	2
<b>Female* (Britany)</b> Science – Applied	2	2.5	1	1
Female French – Academic	1	1	1.5	1.5
<b>Female* (Leila)</b> French – Academic	1.2	3.5	1	2.5
<b>Female* (Mandi)</b> French – Academic	2	2.5	2	1.5
Female French – Academic	3	1.5	3.2	1
<b>Female* (Stacey)</b> French – Academic	1.2	2.5	1.2	2
*Students contacted and asked to participate (n = 14)				
*Students who agreed to participate indicated by name (n = 12)				
<b>Note:</b> Names of participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.				

The Survey for High School Students in Grade Nine (Appendix A) employed 5-point Likert scales to quantify each participant's level of agreement and/or disagreement with each of the 18 Likert items or statements. Participants who associated themselves strongly with computer use (Statements 1 – 7) and creativity (Statements 12 – 16) were identifiable by a lower mean self-rating, whereas those who viewed themselves as lacking school engagement were identifiable by a higher mean self-rating on survey items relating to school engagement (Statements 8 – 11, 17 and 18). Those Grade Nine students who demonstrated lower mean scores on computer use and creativity while also rating higher mean scores on school engagement were selected to participate in the second phase of the study. A table was then created to demonstrate those results (Table 3.1). Of the fourteen students (n = 14) selected and contacted, twelve (n = 12) agreed to participate in the modified ethnographic phase of the research study (May 2010).

#### Key Term

*At-risk* participants were initially identified as those students who indicated that they strongly disagreed with Statements 8 – 11 on the “Survey for High School Students in Grade Nine” (Appendix A).

### **PHASE II – Modified Ethnographic Study**

As part of the modified ethnography, the selected participants (n = 12) were asked to: participate in two audio-recorded, one-hour interviews; complete a standardized assessment, *The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* (TTCT), an instrument that is designed to measure their aptitudes as creative thinkers; share

their thoughts and feelings about high school on a daily basis for two weeks, using the multi-modal response journal; and allow the primary investigator to access their Ontario Provincial Report Card. *Note: A detailed step-by-step outline of this research study is provided in a flow-chart format. (Appendix G.)*

Each participant was initially contacted by telephone, and the time and place for the first interview session were planned during that introductory conversation. Because of the short timelines, it was agreed that the study would necessarily involve two one-hour interview sessions instead of three. It was also agreed that the first one-hour interview session would be followed by administration of the TTCT (a forty-five minute process). All participants opted to hold the first interview session after school hours and at their home schools. Participants were assured that they would be paid \$25.00 for the first one-hour interview session and then another \$25.00 for the extra hour it would take to complete the TTCT. Students were also asked to specify what arrangements they would have in place for getting home after the first interview session was over. Arrangements were then made with the school Principal to hold the interviews in the school, at a secluded and quiet location that would be free of interruptions. In Secondary School A, the interview sessions were held in an unused co-op office. Secondary School B offered the use of a conference room, and Secondary School C provided an unoccupied faculty lunch room for the interview sessions. Between May 31 and June 15, an interview was held after school each school day with one of the participants, until all participants had been interviewed.

### Interview Session #1

After initial introductions and informal greetings, the interview session began with a reminder that this was a confidential interview and would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only. Participants were then asked to sign the Ethnographic Study Assent Form (Appendix E) and the Audio Assent Form (Appendix F). Before the audio-recording began, each participant was presented with a \$50.00 honorarium (\$25.00 for the first interview session and \$25.00 for participation in the TTCT). The honorarium was based on the shortened timelines and Letter of Information for Consent to Participate in Research (Appendix B).

Although, participants were urged to answer the interview questions as honestly and thoughtfully as possible, they were also reminded that they had the option of not answering any given question and/or of withdrawing from the interview session at any point. Table 3.2 provides a sample of the interview questions asked in the first interview session.

At the end of the interview, students took a ten-minute break before they began the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*. They were provided with a snack and juice during the break.

### Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking

Developed by Dr. E. Paul Torrance, the *Verbal TTCT: Thinking Creatively with Words* is a 45-minute standardized test designed to assess a participant's ability to think in creative and innovative ways. Longitudinal studies have demonstrated the predictive validity in pencil-and-paper measures of creativity such as the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Cropley, 2000; DeMoss, Milich,



& DeMers, 1993). Appropriate for first graders through adults, the *Verbal TTCT* uses six word-based exercises to assess three mental characteristics: fluency, flexibility and originality. The exercises provided participants with opportunities to ask questions, to improve products, and to imagine what would happen in a given situation. *Note: A more detailed description of the TTCT has been provided (Appendix J).*

### **SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - SCHEDULE #1 (Table 3.2)**

<b>SAMPLE QUESTIONS: Interview One</b>
What is your home life like in terms of: your responsibilities, recreational activities and social life?
What was elementary school like for you in terms of your: likes and/or dislikes, extracurricular activities, relationships, attendance and grades?
Describe your first day of Grade Nine and include information about your: transportation, clothing, classes, friends and feelings.
Share any concerns that you have about Grade Nine and include concerns about your: workload, relationships, grades and teacher expectations.
What courses did you take each semester and how did you decide which courses to take?
Describe any extracurricular activities that you were involved in this year.
Describe any activities that you are involved in outside of school e.g. religious groups, creative pursuits, employment, service groups.
Describe your typical school day and include information about your: morning routines, classes, lunch hour, after school activities, homework and evening routines.
What do you like most and/or least about being in Grade Nine?
What would you tell a Grade 8 student about what it is like to be in Grade Nine?
Are you ever bored in high school? Where and when are you most likely to feel bored?
When do you feel happiest at school? Explain why.
<b>NOTE:</b> "Interview Schedule #1" (Appendix H)

The TTCT was administered according to the specific instructions for administering the test activities provided in the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking Directions Manual* (1990), which accompanied the Verbal TTCT booklets. These instructions included verbatim scripts to read aloud before each activity, as well as strict time allotments for each activity. According to the administration guidelines, participants were encouraged to use their imaginations to think up ideas and to put those ideas into words. They were also to be told that there are no right or wrong ideas, and that the point of each exercise is to think of as many interesting and unusual ideas as possible in the time provided.

Accompanying the TTCT booklets was a 75-page manual for scoring and interpreting the results, titled *Manual for Scoring and Interpreting Results: Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking – Verbal, Forms A and B* (1990). Each activity was scored for fluency, originality and flexibility. The *fluency score* was essentially the total number of relevant responses, with relevancy defined in terms of the requirements stipulated for each activity. Examples of responses that would not meet the relevancy criteria were provided for each activity. Responses that qualified for fluency credit were then scored for originality. The *originality score* was determined by checking each relevant response against a “zero-response list” which was provided for each activity. If the response was listed on the zero-response list, it received a score of 0. All other relevant responses were given originality scores of 1. The relevant responses were also scored for flexibility. The *flexibility scores* were obtained by using the flexibility

categories provided for each activity. Each relevant response was classified into one of the flexibility categories. The flexibility score itself was simply the number of different categories represented in the relevant responses provided. Fluency, originality and flexibility scores for each activity were then recorded on the scoring worksheet provided for each booklet. The scores for each activity were then summarized and placed in the appropriate summary boxes provided. Next, the activity scores were totaled and these numbers formed the raw scores for fluency, originality and flexibility. Using the Norms Tables provided, a standard score for fluency, originality and flexibility was determined based on the raw scores obtained (Torrance, 1990, p.46). Once the standard scores for fluency, originality and flexibility were obtained, they were averaged. The Norms Tables were then used again to determine a national percentile rank for each participant's mean standard score. *Note: To ensure inter-rater reliability in scoring, booklets were scored by the primary investigator as well as by an impartial examiner. Discrepancies in scoring between the primary investigator and the impartial examiner were discussed and TTCT booklets were re-scored by the impartial examiner and the primary investigator until consensus was reached (Torrance, 1990). A confidentiality agreement was signed by the impartial scorer to ensure participants' confidentiality (Appendix K).*

### Key Term

*Creatively-inclined* participants were identified as those students whose scores were Above Average (61-100%) on the Average Standard Score of the

*Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*, as outlined in the *Manual for Scoring and Interpreting Results* (p. 45).

Final percentile scores on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) and an interpretation of what those scores suggested were shared with all participants by means of a letter that was sent out by mail. Guidelines for sharing results with individuals, as outlined in the *Manual for Scoring and Interpreting Results: Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking – Verbal Forms A and B* (1990), were followed during the primary investigator's discussions with students.

#### Multi-modal Journals

When participants had completed the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*, they were provided with a mechanical pencil, a novelty pen and a hard-cover notebook to use as a journal. They were reminded that, as part of the study, they had agreed to keep a daily journal for at least two weeks, during which time they were expected to make entries each day and to include dates and times for each entry. Since each multi-modal journal contained an equal number of lined pages and blank pages, participants were free to include any or all of the following: significant quotations from famous people or friends and family; status updates from participants' Facebook accounts; comments posted on their Facebook walls; photographs; drawings, cartoons and/or artwork; personal schedules; text messages – sent and/or received; school assignments; previous report cards; childhood memories; opinions on topics of interest; descriptive and/or narrative writing; poetry or song lyrics; commentary on school life and/or family life and/or

part-time jobs; future plans, dreams and ambitions; immediate concerns and/or fears; and feelings and/or personal responses.

A typewritten list of journal suggestions, as well as researcher expectations concerning entry data, was taped to the inside cover of each journal. Students were encouraged to be as creative as they liked, and to include anything that they felt would help readers understand what life was like for them as students in Grade Nine.

Journals were collected at the beginning of the second interview session. The written contents were transcribed and content analysis was performed to describe all art work included in the journals. Photocopies of the journals were made and the original journals were mailed back to the participants. A personal thank-you note was included with each journal. The note also encouraged participants to continue to use the journals as a way of documenting their lives through photographs, art work and personal writing.

### Interview Session #2

Each participant was contacted to arrange a time and place for the second interview session. The first one-hour interview sessions were held at their home schools, and all participants opted to hold their second interview session in the same locations, presumably for reasons of convenience. Since exams were now over, participants could arrange their interview sessions much earlier in the day. Also, since there was no testing to be done, two or three participants could be scheduled for each afternoon session. Students were again asked to specify the arrangements they would have in place for getting home after the interview

session. Arrangements were made with the school Principals to hold interviews in the same locations where the first interviews had been held. Interviews were held over the course of five half-days between June 24 and June 30, 2010.

After initial informal conversations about summer plans, the interview began with another reminder that this was a confidential interview and would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only. Participants were then asked to submit their multi-modal journals. Before the audio-recording began, participants were each presented with a \$50.00 honorarium (\$25.00 for their participation in the second interview session and \$25.00 for their participation in completing the multimodal journal – as originally agreed upon and approved). Although, participants were urged to answer the questions as honestly and thoughtfully as possible, they were also reminded that they had the option of not answering any given question and/or of withdrawing from the interview session at any point. Table 3.3 provides a sample of the interview questions asked in the second interview session.

Following the interviews, students were asked if they wanted to know what the scores were on their TTCT. All participants had an opportunity to discuss their test scores, and were told that a hard copy of their results would be mailed to their homes in August. All participants provided mailing addresses and indicated that they would like a copy of their TTCT scores mailed to their home address. Participants were also asked if they would like their journals returned after they were photocopied and, again all participants indicated that they would.

Multi-modal journals and TTCT results were mailed back to participants in August.

### **SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – SCHEDULE #2 (*Table 3.3*)**

<b>SAMPLE QUESTIONS: Interview Two</b>
What did you include in your journal and why did you include it?
What are you hoping to do when you are finished high school? Have your plans changed since you started Grade Nine?
What optional credits are you planning to take next year? Why have you selected them?
Will you be involved in any extracurricular activities or clubs next year? If so, which ones and why have you selected them?
In your survey, you indicated that you saw yourself as a creative person. Do you still see yourself that way? Explain why or why not.
If you can imagine what your life will be like in ten years, will it involve any creative pursuits? If so, explain what you will be doing.
Which courses this year seemed to meet your creative needs or helped you to see the world in a new way?
A number of participants have talked about how Grade Nine provided them with an opportunity to change who they were. Did you see Grade Nine as a chance to do that?
If you had a chance to do Grade Nine all over again, what would you change?
What would you tell a Grade 8 student about what it is like to be in Grade Nine?
In one word, sentence or phrase, describe what high school has been like for you.
If you had a magic wand and could change any part of high school, what would you change and why?
<b>NOTE:</b> <i>"Interview Schedule #2" (Appendix I)</i>

### **Report Cards**

Since report cards were not available at the time of the final set of interviews, Principals had to be contacted directly. Signed consent forms were faxed to school Principals in order that report cards could be released. When

they became available, Principals put aside participants' Semester One and Semester Two report cards for the participants. All report cards were mailed to my home address by July 20, 2010.

Information from Semester One and Semester Two report cards was organized into a one-page table for each participant. The table included: course codes; midterm and final grades for each course; a summary of teacher comments; overall attendance and late scores; and learning skills (ability to work independently, teamwork skills, initiative, homework habits and organization skills). The tables (Appendix L) were designed to summarize each participant's overall academic performance as well as her work ethic – as seen through the eyes of ten teachers over the course of an entire school year.

### **Characteristics of Participants Selected**

The all-female sample ( $n = 12$ ) was described in more detail for simple comparison purposes only (Table 3.4). The comparison table included information concerning each participant's: home school; number of siblings; parents' education and marital status; and creative interests.

### **Methodology Rationale:**

Drawing upon the premise that qualitative research provides “a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context” (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005), a grounded theory approach was selected to decipher the experiences of Grade Nine students in the context of a modified ethnographic research design. Data collected during the research was used to generate



theoretical models to systemize complex factors affecting the qualities of “resilience” and/or being “at-risk” and/or being “creatively-inclined” as Grade Nine students in Ontario high schools.

**PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS (*Table 3.4*)**

Name*	School	# of Siblings	Biological Mother's Education	Biological Father's Education	Living Arrangements	Creative Interests
Lee	A	1	College	College	Living with mom, dad and younger sister	Dance
Gail	A	1	University	College	Living with mom, dad and younger sister	Visual Arts & Photography
Ally	A	0	College	Grade 12	Living with mom (parents are separated)	Instrumental Music & Dance
Rita	A	1	Grade 12	Grade 12	Living with mom, step-dad, grandparents and younger brother (parents are divorced)	Drama & Creative Writing
Shelly	A	3	Grade 12	Grade 12	Living with mom and three younger brothers (parents are divorced)	Instrumental Music & Drama
Nicky	A	1	University	University	Living with mom, dad and younger sister	Instrumental Music & Visual Arts
Anna	B	1	College	College	Living with mom, dad and older brother	Dance & Drama
Alexis	B	2	College	Grade 12	Living with mom, step-dad, younger sister and younger brother (parents are divorced)	Vocal Music & Drama
Leila	C	1	College	Grade 12	Living with mom, step-dad and older brother (parents are divorced)	Visual Arts & Photography
Stacey	C	1	University	University	Living with mom, dad and younger sister	Visual Arts & Drawing
Mandi	C	0	University	N/A	Living with mom (dad is deceased)	Instrumental Music & Dance
Britany	C	0	Grade 12	Grade 12	Living with mom and dad and older brother	Vocal Music & Creative Writing

**\*Note:** Names of participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Decisions about data collection for this study were based on the principle that adolescents are active meaning-makers and that educators need to respect both the genres of literacy that adolescents create and the contexts in which they

feel most comfortable (Freire, 1995; Lesley, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2004). In keeping with this principle, participants were asked to communicate through journal entries that could include: quotations; status-updates; photographs; artwork; cartoons; song lyrics; personal schedules; text messages; childhood memories; opinions; descriptive and/or narrative writing; commentary on school life and/or family life and/or part-time jobs; future plans and ambitions; and/or immediate concerns and fears.

Different from diary-writing, multi-modal journals were unique in that they allowed students opportunities to communicate their ideas without being restricted to the written word and provided participants with the chance to show as well as to tell their stories. A content analysis of images, photograph selections, song lyrics, movie synopses, opinions, and personal schedules provided a much richer source of data than would a discourse analysis of participant's written responses alone.

A multi-modal response journal was implemented as another way to reveal important information concerning student engagement/disengagement: Student engagement and/or disengagement was a crucial aspect of how students navigated their first year of high school. In their research study, Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) addressed three dimensions of student engagement: academic, social and intellectual. Participants' provincial report cards provided important information about teachers' perceptions of their academic engagement, and interview sessions provided insights into students' levels of social engagement. Intellectual engagement, however, was much more challenging to

uncover. Built on Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) concept of flow, the daily journal was designed to provide a sense of participants' levels of intellectual engagement over time. Since participants were asked to respond in their journals each day, these regular updates provided valuable perspectives on how students were feeling and on their levels of engagement from day to day.

The data collection method employed in this study was based on an emerging design in grounded theory research; data was collected (from interviews and daily journal entries) and analyzed immediately so that decisions about what data to collect next could be based on these analyses (Creswell, 2002). For example, data from the first set of interviews seemed to suggest that students entering Grade Nine made deliberate attempts to recreate themselves in terms of their physical appearances and of their attitudes toward peers and school life. As a result of that early data analysis, questions designed to explore students' concepts of identity and identity formation were formulated and included in the second interview session. In like manner, this process of ongoing and immediate data analysis prompted journal topics for participants' multi-modal journal responses.

Although the initial purpose of the study was kept at the forefront, unanticipated contingencies in participant responses or circumstances emerged, and data collection procedures were adjusted to accommodate these new perspectives and contexts (Brantlinger, Jiminez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Glasser & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, an unforeseen compression of timelines meant that the interviews were held closer

to the end of the semester. This also meant that participants were filling in their daily journal entries during the exam period – arguably the most stressful time in the semester. Although unplanned, this provided an opportunity to see students at a time in their school year that was marked by high stress. Grounded theory allows for such unanticipated contingencies and, in practice, has the capacity to systematize such complex and unexpected factors and to find a legitimate place for them in the emerging theoretical framework.

Within grounded theory research design, theoretical sampling is a key feature. According to Charmaz (2006), “[t]heoretical sampling is purposeful sampling, but it’s purposeful sampling according to categories that one develops from one’s analysis and these categories are not based on quotas; they’re based on theoretical concerns” (p. 101). Participants in this study were initially selected based on their self-identifications as being both inherently creative and engaged in computer-based social networking, while simultaneously having a low degree of school engagement. On the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*, however, only half of the participants scored above average in terms of their percentile ranks as creative thinkers. Of those seven, two participants actually scored in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile. As these results came to light, it made sense to create two smaller theoretical samples. The original purposeful sample (n = 12) was thus divided to form a theoretical sample of participants (n = 7) who scored higher than average on the TTCT and another (n = 5) who scored in the Average or Below Average range on the TTCT. This reconfiguration allowed for what

Charmaz (2006) refers to as “tightening the corkscrew or the hermeneutic spiral” (p. 101).

### Developing Codes

Initial coding began already during each of the first interview sessions, as significant phrases, words and quotations that seemed worth probing in the next interview session were documented in field notes. Transcription began immediately following each interview. Salient code words and/or phrases that emerged from the data were documented and recurring themes were explored more fully in the second interview session. Also, adapting Glasser’s(1978) idea of coding with gerunds rather than with nouns (e.g. use of “perceiving” rather than “perception”), provided a fluidity to the data collection process, as new ways to look at the data emerged.

### Open Coding

Immediately following each of the final interview sessions, the audio-recording as well as the contents of the multi-modal journal were transcribed, and hard copies of these transcriptions were printed. Open coding, a systematic process involving line-by-line analysis of data, was employed to label phrases and ideas that could be relevant to the research investigation. Initial pencil-and-paper open coding sessions generated a listing of approximately 280 code words and/or phrases (Appendix M). A computer-aided data analysis software program, *Atlas.ti – The Knowledge Workbench* (Version 6.0), was then utilized to collate and analyze data in an ongoing and interactive way. Once transcripts were imported, the Atlas.ti software program made it possible, not only to attach a

code label to each potentially relevant word or phrase, but also to determine the adequacy of the current listing of codes. This process of focused coding allowed me to make decisions about which initial codes made the most analytic sense, while also allowing me to categorize the data into emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006). Core categories/themes that coalesced from this initial process of open coding included: participants' creative interests, activities and notions of creativity; participants' emotions or feelings as they reflected on their sense of engagement at school; participants' relationships with family members and participants' conceptualizations of family support; participants' identity formation processes and development; as well as participants' views on school life generally and on the transition process from elementary school into high school. Code words and phrases were categorized and sorted under these five headings and a frequency table was then created (Appendix N).

### Axial Coding

Axial coding – a process which essentially reassembles data in new ways – was then employed as a means to ascertain novel connections between the initial categories. It also served to tighten the parameters defining categories and to delineate new subcategories. Applying the constant comparative procedure entailed in grounded-theory methodology, relationships among categories were either identified and then changed; combined with other categories; discarded; or subsumed under other categories. In the end, three main categories or themes emerged: engagement, transition, and creative self-identity. Within these categories, a number of subcategories emerged during the ongoing analysis

(Appendix O: “Codes, Sub-Categories and Categories”). These included: academic disengagement; intellectual disengagement; social engagement; negative and/or positive self-perceptions; creative personal identity; and transition strategies employed. Using Atlas.ti software, frequency tables were then created for each of the subcategories.

Although there remains considerable overlap between subcategories, there was no attempt made to reflect every code without exception in a subcategory. Also, no attempt was made to derive a core category that would encompass the four conceptual categories selected to inform the evolving the theory.

### Theoretical Coding

The computer-aided data analysis software Atlas.ti facilitated text analysis and interpretation, including the selection, coding, annotation and comparison of noteworthy discourse segments and/or images. Since Atlas.ti is more than simply a code-and-retrieve program, its graphical network builder was used to generate a visual representation of the network of concepts and relationships (Smit, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This was especially helpful in recognizing, understanding and illustrating emerging concepts and themes. The graphical network builder provided a very useful framework within which to formulate and develop illuminating theory.

#### 4. FINDINGS

Do not decode  
these cries of mine –  
they are the road,  
and not the sign.

Cohen (2006)

Although, according to Glasser (1978), it is understood that the grounded theorist writes about concepts and not people, it is the students in this study who provide the crucial backdrop. As Cohen (2006) so aptly discerned, their self-expressions are the road and not the sign. For this reason, it is their very words – interspersed where appropriate – that serve to ground the derived theoretical concepts. Direct quotations from the study participants are included, not as empirical support for concepts, but as a means of characterizing and exemplifying the theoretical categories and interpretations offered. Through elaboration of each conceptual category and its relationships with theoretically-coded subcategories, this chapter develops and presents a framework generated to explain how creatively-inclined students manage their transition into high school. That theoretical model encompassed both protective situational factors and active strategies that creatively-inclined students employed.

##### **Employing Ideal Types as a Heuristic Device**

The concept of theoretical typification, which has played a significant role in empirical social science research from its very beginning, has experienced a renaissance in qualitative studies over the past thirty years (Kluge, 2000; Kwang-ki & Berard, 2009; Lindner & Briggs, 2010; Torr, 2008). According to Kwang-ki



and Berard (2009), typification has been central to social science methodology in a number of respects. As a social phenomenon, it has been a commonsense method of perception and communication. As a theoretical phenomenon, it has been a key topic of critical discussion among social scientists. As a practical scientific method, it has been employed by social scientists in their research. Theoretical typification, most commonly referred to as an ideal types methodology, has its roots in the analytic and empirical work of Weber (Kluge, 2000; Kwang-ki & Berard, 2009; Lindner & Briggs, 2010; Torr, 2008; Weber, 1994).

Weber (1994) himself defined theoretical typification as the synthesis of “diffuse, discrete, more or less present, and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena” into a unified and analytical construct or ideal type (p. 264). As a social-scientific method, implementation of Weber’s ideal types methodology has traditionally been considered useful in that it allowed “for anonymous and objective knowledge of social phenomena which are themselves subjective and intersubjective” (Kwang-ki & Berard, 2009, p. 264). More recently, however, in their employment of ideal typification, qualitative research scientists have abandoned notions of objectivity and independence as researchers (Lindner & Briggs, 2010). My own interest in typification, within the context of this study, was in its use as a heuristic device – an experience-based technique to make sense of and organize my data. As does Torr (2008), I recognize that an ideal type “starts its life in the presuppositions of the researcher” (p. 152). When employing an ideal types methodology, therefore, Lindner and Briggs (2010)

suggested that a counter-balance to the inherent bias in qualitative research is for researchers to recognize and explicitly state their preconceptions and theoretical backgrounds as an aspect of their research methodology.

### Theoretical Sensitivity

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), theoretical sensitivity is a personal quality of the researcher and “refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (p. 42). The issue then becomes one of balance – balance between a researcher’s sensitivity to the data on the one hand and the intrusion of researcher bias into the analysis on the other hand. Strauss and Corbin (1998) have offered a number of techniques for balancing the two, and several of these approaches I have deliberately employed in this research study.

### Multiple Data Sources

In addressing the risk of researcher bias at the study design stage, Strauss and Corbin (1998) have suggested that a key strategy is to “gather data on the same event or phenomenon in different ways” (p. 44). Although not arguing for triangulation (the application of several research methodologies) per se, Strauss and Corbin (1998) have seen real utility in gathering data from multiple sources. Accordingly, as a way to reduce researcher bias, I gathered my research data by a number of means. One source of data collection consisted of interview sessions held on two separate occasions. Multi-modal journals that allowed participants freedom to share their experiences without interview

questions and/or other prompts produced a second distinct source of data.

Participants' provincial report cards, as an important third source of data, were accessed as a way to independently corroborate what participants stated in their journals and interviews about their academic performances in Grade Nine.

Administration of a standardized test, the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*, yielded a fourth source of data, consisting of objective measures of participants' creative thinking capabilities. Thus, one fundamental strategy to reduce the influence of researcher bias in this study has been to employ multiple sources of data collection on the same phenomenon.

### Professional Background

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), valid origins of theoretical sensitivity on the part of the researcher include the researcher's own professional background. Professional experience, i.e. practice in the field of study, enhances the researcher's "knowledge base and insight available to draw upon in the research" (p. 42). In terms of my own professional background, I have completed a Master's degree thesis that examined the relative curricular emphasis placed on functional writing versus imaginative writing in the Ontario Secondary School system. As part of that research, I designed surveys, interviewed participants and performed textbook content analyses – all skills that I have been able to apply in this research study as well. Also, having taught adolescents for fifteen years as a qualified Ontario Secondary School teacher has provided me with hands-on experience in Ontario's education system – where my research study has been conducted. Seven of those fifteen years have been invested in establishing,

supervising and serving as an instructor in Alternative Education classrooms oriented to youth who are at risk for early school leaving and who have been removed from the traditional classroom setting. This professional experience has led to the development of a rich background in administrative procedures around credit accumulation, credit rescue and credit recovery. As the lead author of a resource book (titled *Students First: Creating Dynamic Classrooms*, 2007) for teachers who work with students-at-risk in the traditional classroom, I have carried out academic research around adolescent development, risk factors associated with Ontario's youth, and issues concerning student engagement at school. Taken together, my professional experience and related academic research background have equipped me with the skills needed to analyse the data I have collected and to make expert decisions in employing typification – the methodology used to organize and make sense of the data collected in this study.

### Demonstration of Rigour

In like manner, Lincoln and Guba (1995) have pointed to transparency on the part of the researcher as a key strategy to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research data. Recognizing the inherent subjectivity of the ideal types technique in organizing data, I rely on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria to establish my own trustworthiness as a researcher.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have identified the following four standards for assessing rigour and establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility (establishing confidence in the findings); transferability (establishing

applicability); dependability (establishing consistency); and confirmability (establishing neutrality of the researcher). The following table summarizes the strategies I have employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and findings in this study and to establishing my qualification as a researcher to validly employ ideal types.

#### ESTABLISHING TRUSTWORTHINESS (*Table 4.1*)

Evaluative Criteria	Strategies	Employment
<b>Credibility</b>	Prolonged Engagement	✓ I participated as sole interviewer in each of the 24 interview sessions
	Triangulation	✓ Different types of data were collected: provincial report card results; transcribed one-on-one audio-recorded interviews; content analysis of response journal entries; and standardized testing results ( <i>Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking</i> )
	Peer Debriefing	✓ Informal debriefing occurred on a weekly basis with a colleague in a Faculty of Education PhD program
<b>Transferability</b>	Thick Description	✓ Methodology and findings have been described in sufficient detail to allow readers to make judgements concerning applicability
<b>Dependability</b>	Inquiry Audit	✓ An expert in qualitative analysis and Atlas.ti software reviewed my codes and coding methods ✓ <i>Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking</i> were re-scored by an impartial scorer
<b>Confirmability</b>	Audit Trail	✓ Accessibility to audit trail provided in the form of: field notes; audio-recorded and transcribed interview sessions; photocopies of journals and provincial report cards; TTCT booklets and scoring sheets; Atlas.ti frequency tables

### Employing Ideal Types

According to Kluge (2000), typology consists of a grouping process whereby the elements encompassed within a type are as similar as possible, and each ideal type is based on a cluster of selected attributes and their dimensions. The factor that sets types apart from one another is the strength of their differences. Drawing on Weber's ideas concerning ideal types, Torr (2000) explained that an ideal type is "deliberately intended to identify the specific characteristics that make the particular aspect of social reality that one is interested in unique" (p.152). Ideal types are not ideal in any evaluative sense or as a model for what ought to be, but are merely representative of an identifiable type as defined on the basis of the attributes selected (Weber, 1994).

For the purposes of this research study, I selected five key student attributes to characterize an ideal type that can be associated with high risk for academic failure. Consistent with Kluge (2000), these same five attributes effectively distinguish the ideal type that is at high risk for academic failure while, conversely, also specifying an ideal type not associated with high risk for academic failure. The attributes selected for typification in this study were based in part on criteria used by researchers over the past decade to identify Ontario Secondary School students who are at risk for early school leaving. They were also based in part on criteria uncovered through my own research.

The first key attribute selected to identify ideal types in this study was academic disengagement. Wilms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) identified lack of academic engagement (as measured through attendance and punctuality) as a

risk factor for early school leaving. Certain participants in this study also cited lack of academic engagement in explaining their Grade Nine outcomes. For example, Leila admitted that she often felt unengaged and simply skipped classes to be with her friends instead:

“I don’t bother getting a late slip if I am late...if I was late I go to the corner...smoking corner, that’s what people call it. I don’t smoke or anything, just cause a lot of my friends are there and wait for them to finish their smoke and if they are skipping too we usually just go to town or just stand around there and not have much fun or if we went to town we would just walk around town and buy food and just talk and buy food for just a period or sometimes we even go to their house and watch TV for a bit. Just stuff like that. I’d go to one class and then eat lunch with the same routine type of thing. And it kinda depends on the day but a lot of the times we just stand around and talk.”

In fact, Leila had skipped so many classes that she was suspended for truancy twice during her first year of high school. Leila admitted being afraid she was going to fail her courses and then might not be able to graduate with her friends.

Intellectual disengagement (in terms of curriculum that is not experienced as engaging or emotionally relevant) was another risk factor identified by researchers examining the issue of early school leaving in Ontario’s Secondary Schools during the past decade (Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; King, 2003; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Participants in my study likewise frequently cited lack of engagement as a key element of their Grade Nine experiences. For example, Shelly expressed her lack of intellectual engagement in no uncertain terms when she said:

I honestly want something to happen that’s exciting...like one thing that is exciting...cause if I keep doing the same thing over and over again I’m going to kill myself...cause honestly like...I’m an adventurous person...and I enjoy something exciting to

happen and...um...honestly...um...I really...I don't know how to explain it...but uh...all my...sometimes my subjects can be really boring um because of the subject or cause there is so much work and people are talking around you and you can't focus and it's like uh.... I don't want to do this anymore...so it's like, what am I going to do for an hour? So I find that really boring.

According to Shelly, she came into Grade Nine excited; yet, a lot of the excitement was lost by the time she began her second semester. She often found herself sitting in class, feeling unengaged and even frustrated by the boredom.

Lack of credit accumulation was another risk factor identified by researchers studying early school leaving in Ontario's Secondary Schools (King, 2003). King (2003) maintained that students who fall behind in credit accumulation in Grade Nine were at higher risk for early school leaving. Rate of credit accumulation was also a key discriminant among the participants in my study. According to Alexis, when she began Grade Nine, she was inadvertently placed in the Essential-level stream. She was well into her school year before she realized that Essential-level courses are designed for students who do not intend to go to college after graduation. Since Alexis did aspire to a college education, she found herself lagging in credit accumulation before she had even completed the first semester. Her frustration was apparent as she complained during our first interview session about that mistake:

I wanted to be in Applied courses. Math, because I'm lower in it, I'm in the Essentials. That was last semester and now I'm trying to go up a level and I'm going to have to go into it next year. The Applied Math Grade Nine will be in first semester and then the next semester after that I have to go into Applied Math Grade Ten.



By the end of Grade Nine, Alexis was already behind her expected academic pace by two credits (Mathematics and Science) and was painfully aware that, in making up those missed courses, she might not be able to graduate with her peers.

An adolescent's self-perception and sense of self-efficacy was another crucial aspect in predicting successful academic outcomes, and was an important research dimension in this study as well. Studies that have examined resilience in adolescents-at-risk point to their self-perceptions and sense of self-efficacy as playing critical roles in their development (Dweck, 2007; Prince-Embury & Courville, 2008; Ungar, 2004). In multiple studies investigating the determinants of resilience in at-risk youth, listings of protective factors have included participants' feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy as well as of attractiveness to others with respect to both personality and appearance (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993; Luthar, 1991; Masten, 1997). Participants' self-perceptions in the areas of self-worth and self-efficacy emerged as significant prognostic factors in my study as well. During interview sessions and in their journals, a number of participants shared deep insecurities about their appearances, their creative abilities and the reliability of important friendships. For example, in reflecting on relationships with her peer group, Leila stated:

...it like scared me a lot cause I was like, who do I actually want to be for these people? Like what's the group I actually want to get into or like me and stuff, and it was kind of hard cause like, it was hard to balance my friends but...like...ultimately I wanted to...like...have more friends and I was usually shy normally.

In terms of her physical appearance, too, Leila had included several self-portraits in her journal – harshly critiquing herself as being ugly and looking like a pig.

Among participants in this study, there came to light great differences in the extent to which they had engaged in at-risk behaviours such as under-age drinking, use of illegal substances, partying and multiple sexual partners during their Grade Nine year. This variability was one of the attributes taken into account to differentiate ideal types in this study. Research on adolescent brain development has ascertained that the prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain responsible for executive decision-making) remains incompletely developed at this stage of adolescence (Baird, Fugelsang, & Bennett, 2005; Lenroot & Giedd, 2006; Luna, 2009). Accordingly, due to their limited ability to appreciate the consequences of their behaviours, students in this age-group are at increased risk (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Lenroot & Giedd, 2006; Walsh, 2006). This inability to fully appreciate consequences may well explain why some teenagers make the choice to engage in high-risk activities. In my own study, a number of participants openly shared their involvements in alcohol and drug use, and in unchaperoned partying. Lee, in one of her journal responses, described having been selected by her friends to provide the alcohol for an all-night party. However, Lee also adamantly denied drinking any alcohol herself. Her denial raised the issue of participants' willingness generally to disclose involvement in at-risk activities. Accordingly, the research decision was made not to exclude from the group at high risk for academic failure any candidate who met all other criteria but did not acknowledge links to any high-risk activities.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, five attributes were selected to define an ideal type for students who were at high risk for academic failure. These were based, not only on current research criteria, but also on what the participants had to say themselves about being at-risk in this way. These defining attributes included: (1) failure to meet the expected pace of credit accumulation – at least one credit behind what normally would be expected and/or identified deficiencies in learning skill development (as indicated on final provincial report card for Grade Nine); (2) poor attendance – missed an average of 11 or more classes per course during the Grade Nine year (as indicated on provincial report card); (3) detentions or suspensions – at least one office detention and/or suspension during each semester (as disclosed by participant at interview and/or in journal); (4) negative self-perceptions (as indicated by the participant at interview and/or in journal); and (5) evidence of at-risk behaviours e.g. drinking, smoking, truancy, excessive partying – at least two at-risk behaviours (as disclosed by participant at interview and/or in journal). This group was designated Ideal Type A.

Conversely, the attributes selected to define an ideal type for students who are at low risk for academic failure included: (1) meeting the expected pace for credit accumulation – had accumulated eight Grade Nine credits, including all compulsory Grade Nine courses (as indicated on final provincial report card for Grade Nine); (2) reliable attendance – missed fewer than 11 classes (as indicated on provincial report card); (3) no detentions or suspensions (as disclosed by participant at interview and/or in journal); (4) had a positive self-perception (as indicated by participant at interview and/or in journal); and (5) not

involved in any at-risk behaviours (as disclosed by participant at interview and/or in journal). This group was designated as Ideal Type B.

A graphic chart of the selected attributes was designed to help differentiate between Ideal Type A (participants who were at high risk for academic failure) and Ideal Type B (participants who were at low risk for academic failure) and is presented in Table 4.2. Ideal types A and B were then reconfigured in light of participants' results on the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*. Ideal Type A was differentiated into two ideal subtypes. Ideal Type A-1 included those Ideal Type A participants who showed evidence of academic and intellectual disengagement, indicated negative self-perceptions, engaged in at-risk behaviours, were behind the expected pace in credit accumulation and had also scored above-average in terms of their percentile ranks (61% - 100%) on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking. Ideal Type A-2 included those Ideal Type A participants who showed the same characteristics as Ideal Type A-1, except that they scored below average to average in terms of their percentile ranks (0% - 60%) on the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*. Ideal Type B was also divided into two ideal sub-types. Ideal Type B-1 included those Ideal Type B participants who were academically and intellectually engaged, had positive self-perceptions, were not involved in at-risk behaviours, had earned all their compulsory credits in Grade Nine and had also scored above average in terms of their percentile ranks (61% - 100%) on the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*. Ideal Type B-2 included those Ideal Type B participants who showed the same characteristics as Ideal Type B-1, but had scored below average to average in terms of their

**IDEAL TYPES (Table 4.2)**

IDEAL TYPES		
Ideal Type A High Risk for Academic Failure	Differentiating Attributes	Ideal Type B Low Risk for Academic Failure
<b>Academic Disengagement</b>  (missed an average of 11 or more classes per course during the Grade Nine year as indicated in provincial report card)  (evidence of detentions and/or suspensions in interview/ journal data)	<b>attendance</b>  <b>detentions and/or suspensions</b>	<b>Academic Engagement</b>  (missed fewer than an average of 11 classes per course during the Grade Nine as indicated in provincial report card)  (no evidence of detentions and/or suspensions in interview/journal data)
<b>Intellectual Disengagement</b>  (evidence of high level of intellectual disengagement in interview/journal data)	<b>level of intellectual engagement</b>	<b>Intellectual Engagement</b>  (evidence of intellectual engagement in interview/journal data)
<b>Engaged in At-Risk Behaviours</b>  (evidence of two or more high risk behaviours in interview/ journal data)	<b>drinking, smoking, excessive partying, truancy</b>	<b>Not Engaged in At-Risk Behaviours</b>  (no evidence of high risk behaviours in interview/ journal data)
<b>Negative Self-Perception</b>  (evidence of negative self-perception in interview/ journal data)	<b>physical appearance social acceptance attitude</b>	<b>Positive Self-Perception</b>  (evidence of positive self-perception in interview/ journal data)
<b>Behind Expected Pace of Credit Accumulation</b>  (missed at least one compulsory Grade Nine credit as indicated in provincial report card)  (deficiencies in learning skill development as identified by teachers in the provincial report card)	<b>credits accumulated</b>  <b>teacher comments</b>	<b>Credit Accumulation Pace as Expected</b>  (earned all Grade Nine compulsory credits as indicated in provincial report card)  (no deficiencies in learning skill development as identified by teachers in the provincial report card)

percentile ranks (0-60%) on the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*. A graphic chart of the attributes for all ideal types and sub-types was created (Table 4.3).

#### Data Results and Analysis

Data from participants' interviews, journals, provincial report cards and the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* were analyzed. Then, on the basis of defining attributes, each participant was identified as demonstrating characteristics of one of the four ideal sub-types: Type A-1, Type A-2, Type B-1, or Type B-2.

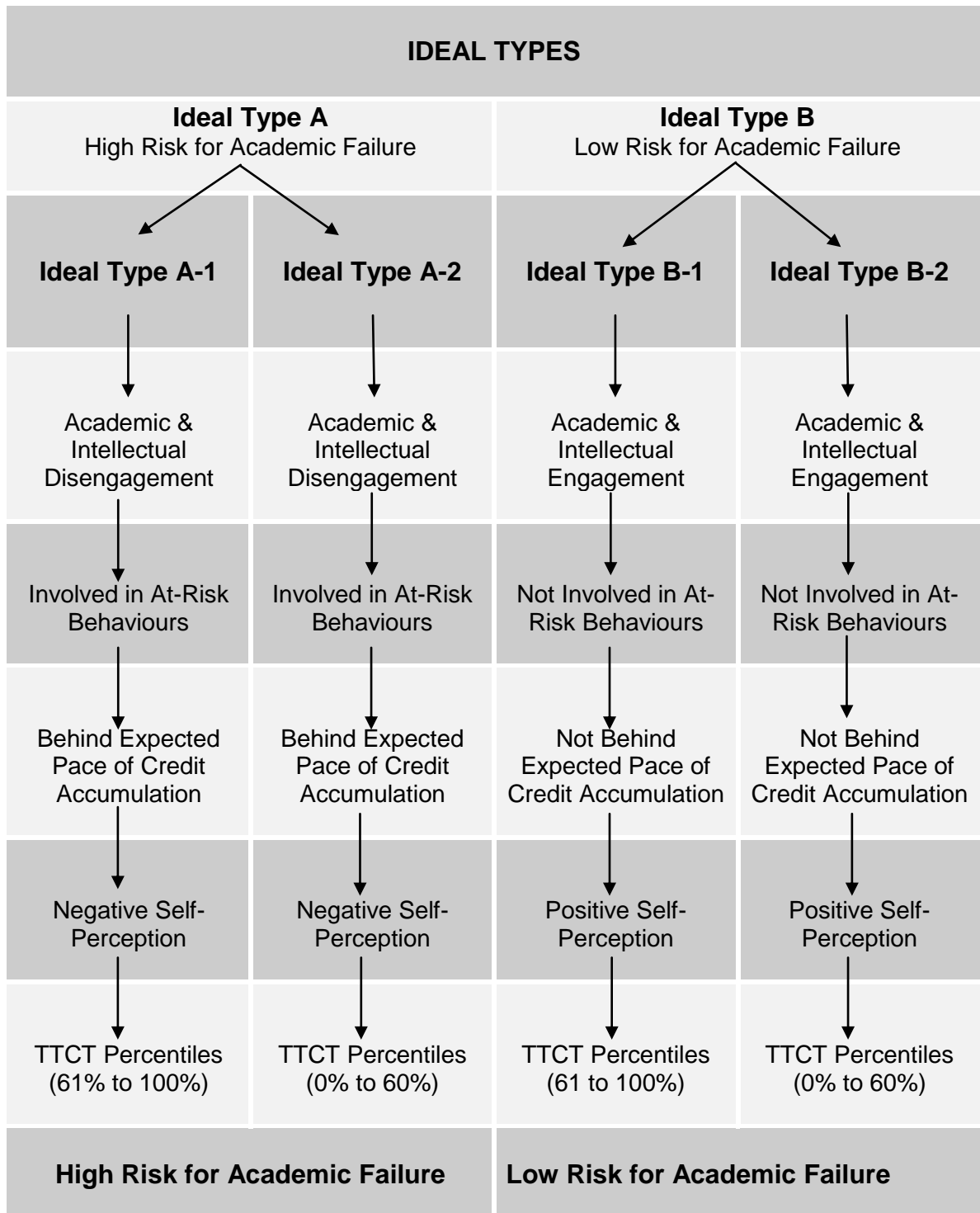
#### Interview and Journal Results

Word-for-word transcripts were prepared of all interview sessions and journal responses. These were reviewed and coded for analysis using the data analysis software program Atlas.ti. Computer analysis yielded three common dimensions along which participants' academic and intellectual engagement, positive and/or negative self-perceptions and degree of involvement in at-risk behaviour were rated. These three subcategories included: a) Academic Disengagement – Non-Conformance; b) Intellectual Engagement; and c) Negative Self-Perceptions.

- a. Academic Disengagement – Non-Conformance Codes accepted as identifiers of instances of academic disengagement in the data included: disclosing involvement in drugs, alcohol and/or tobacco; skipping classes and/or other issues of truancy; perceiving assignment deadlines as being unreasonable and/or rigid; receiving negative comments/feedback from

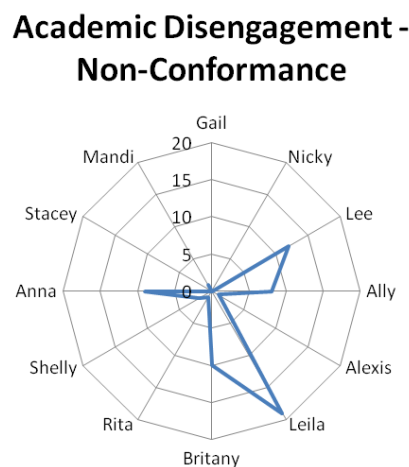
teachers; experiencing negative teacher-student interactions; expressing negative feelings about course selections made; being informally

**IDEAL TYPES A and B (Table 4.3)**



disciplined e.g. office detentions; being formally disciplined e.g. in-school/out-of-school suspensions; and demonstrating poor attendance and/or frequently arriving late for class. Once this data was analyzed and coded, a frequency table for participant responses was created to represent the subcategory “Academic Disengagement – Non-conformance”. A radar graph was generated from the frequencies in this chart to provide a visual representation of the relative prevalence of academic disengagement and non-conformance among the 12 participants (Figure 4.i).

#### **ACADEMIC DISENGAGEMENT (*Figure 4.i*)**



As shown in Figure 4.i, the participants demonstrating the highest frequencies for indicators of academic disengagement were: Leila (19); Lee (12); Britany (10); Anna (9); and Ally (8). In their interview sessions and/or journal entries, Leila, Britany and Lee disclosed that they were involved in at-risk behaviours. Each had engaged in under-age drinking while attending unsupervised weekend parties with friends. Lee further



indicated in her journal that she had been accused by her mother of being bulimic – although she also insisted that this was not the case. Leila's journal also confirmed the fact that, during the last few weeks of Grade Nine, time was spent with friends in town when she should have been in class. In her journal, Leila also described, in significant detail, high-risk behaviours that she had been engaged in, such as campfire parties that included drinking alcohol to excess, smoking illegal substances, and spending the night alone in a tent with boys she met at a party.

Skipping of classes and issues of truancy were also noted in Britany's and Leila's interview sessions and journal entries, contributing to their higher frequency scores. Britany made no excuse for the fact that she would frequently skip classes in order to spend time with her friends. Feeling that there was not enough time in the school day for socializing, according to her journal responses, Britany often joined her friends at the "smokers' corner" instead of attending class. In a number of journal entries, Leila too referred to skipping school. According to Leila, she spent hours at her boyfriend's house or going with a group of friends to an abandoned school. At other times, she would walk into town or spend time with friends at the "smokers' corner" during school hours.

Demanding course work and overall academic workload were also seen as contributing to academic disengagement for Leila, Britany and Lee. During Semester Two, Leila was timetabled for three challenging courses – Academic-level Mathematics, French and Science. According to

Leila, she was bored and frustrated by the heavy schedule, and it became more and more appealing to skip class with her friends and/or boyfriend. By mid-semester, Leila had been suspended for truancy and was failing both Mathematics and Science. Through some creative scheduling on the part of her Guidance counsellor, Leila was moved from the Mathematics course into an optional Hospitality and Tourism Technology course, and from an Academic-level Science to an Applied-level Science course. The reasoning behind these changes was that Leila might be able to salvage her Science credit if she moved to the Applied-level stream. Also, since it was too late in the semester to move her into an Applied Mathematics, it was decided that she could perhaps pick up the Applied Grade Nine Mathematics course during Summer School or else during Grade Ten. As it turned out, Leila did not achieve a passing grade in Applied Science either. By the end of Semester Two, she was trailing by two courses in terms of her expected credit accumulation, placing her at serious academic risk.

For Britany too, Grade Nine had been academically disappointing. Since she had made a decision to focus on the social aspects of high school, Britany had deliberately selected Applied-level courses. Her rationale was that these would be easier, would involve less homework and would allow her to focus on her social life instead. As optional credits, Britany had selected Drama and Vocal Music. Although she asserted at interview that she had really enjoyed Drama initially and had received

honours in the course in the first term, by the end of the semester she had barely passed the Drama course. She had not enjoyed the Vocal Music course, and felt that perhaps she had less talent in that area than she had initially supposed. During Semester One, Britany was pulled into a credit recovery program for students-at-risk so that she could recover her Applied Mathematics credit.

Lee too found the course work challenging in Grade Nine. In her first interview, Lee revealed that, although her first semester had gone well in terms of final grades, she was currently struggling with Science and Mathematics, to the point that her father had begun to tutor her in Mathematics. She also emphasized how important she felt Mathematics and Science were, and that she hoped to focus on those courses during the next year. In fact, she contemplated not participating in the cheerleading squad while in Grade Ten so that she could concentrate on her Mathematics and Science courses. In her journal too, Lee explained frankly how stressed she was feeling about meeting project deadlines and passing her exams. Her high level of stress, due in part to her lack of academic engagement, was evident in her journal entries and interview sessions.

In terms of academic disengagement, Ally too claimed that she struggled academically in Grade Nine. According to Ally, her issues stemmed from the way her courses had been timetabled. With both optional courses falling in the first semester and her more challenging

academic courses concentrated in the second semester, Ally confided in her first interview that she was feeling very stressed over her June exams. Although Ally claimed that she found the coursework in Grade Nine to be very challenging, both in terms of workload and levels of engagement, when asked which sentence best described her Grade Nine experience, Ally selected Sentence B: School is a lot of work but I enjoy the challenge.” As a way to qualify the seeming contradiction, Ally asserted that, whenever things got tough, she told herself, “Okay, I gotta tough it out cause I can’t change it now and I can’t turn back.” Ally’s view of school seemed to suggest that although she felt frustrated academically, she also saw real value in the academic challenges she faced in her second semester of Grade Nine.

Although Anna and Ally scored fairly strongly in the academic disengagement – non-conformance subcategory, closer examination of their scores revealed that their issues centred primarily around academic expectations and not around issues of non-conformance. According to Anna and Ally, they were not involved in at-risk behaviours and they did not make a habit of skipping classes. Although Anna confessed to skipping class on two occasions, she made it clear that she did not leave the school premises; instead, she went to the school library in order to finish up incomplete homework. A number of Anna’s journal entries focused on academic performance, as she described how stressed she was over her exams and how much family pressure she felt to be

academically successful. Anna's brother had just completed his first year of university, and Anna's parents expected her to earn grades high enough to attend university as well. Thus, Anna's references to academic disengagement seemed to stem from the stress she was experiencing while attempting to meet her parents' expectations, but to have little to do with issues of non-compliance and non-conformance.

In terms of academic disengagement and non-conformance, Britany, Lee and Leila appeared to be the participants most at risk overall. Their self-disclosed involvement in high-risk behaviours and their perceptions of school work as challenging and irrelevant, as well as their truancy issues, were markers of higher risk for academic failure. Although Ally provided no evidence of involvement in high-risk behaviours, she did perceive her school work as challenging and irrelevant and therefore was considered at higher risk for academic failure.

- a) Intellectual Disengagement During the coding process, indicators that pointed to intellectual disengagement were identified and these codes were used to uncover instances of intellectual disengagement in the participants' interview transcripts and journal responses. The codes in this subcategory included: skipping classes and truancy issues; sharing negative feelings or emotions about classroom life e.g. bored, frustrated; engaging in off-task classroom behaviours e.g. daydreaming, defying teacher, doodling; citing perceived stimuli that caused negative feelings in the classroom; perceiving self as having below-average intellectual ability;

indicating inadequate levels of teacher support e.g. teacher isn't helpful; receiving negative comments/feedback from teachers; earning low grades; describing low levels of intellectual engagement in the classroom; expressing negative feelings about Grade Nine e.g. school is boring or school is too much work and too difficult; agreeing that "school is boring and as soon as I'm old enough, I'm out of here"; agreeing that "I have felt a lot of stress about school this year and have dreaded going to school most days"; little time spent completing homework assignments; experiencing high degree of assignment difficulty; and experiencing a low degree of engagement with homework assignments.

After data was analyzed and coded, a frequency table was created for the subcategory "Intellectual Disengagement". These frequencies were then used to generate a radar chart that visually represented the frequencies for the "Intellectual Disengagement" subcategory (Figure 4.ii).

**INTELLECTUAL DISENGAGEMENT (Figure 4.ii)**

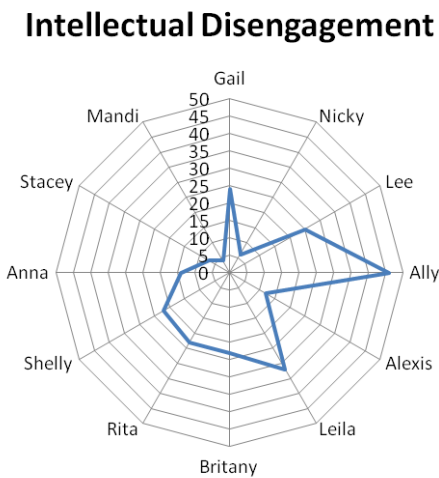


Figure 4.ii illustrates that the participants who identified with the greatest number of indicators of intellectual disengagement were: Ally (46); Leila (32); Lee (25); and Britany, Gail and Rita (23). Although 23 indicators of intellectual disengagement were attributed to Gail, it is important to note that, during her interviews, Gail shared that she enjoyed school for the most part. However, since her classmates were often slower to catch onto concepts, she found herself bored in the classroom on such occasions as the teacher had to re-teach concepts that Gail already understood. Within the Intellectual Disengagement subcategory, Gail's coded indicators all had to do with transient episodes of boredom. For the most part, Gail found Grade Nine quite intellectually engaging. Twenty-three indicators for intellectual disengagement were also attributed to Rita. Like Gail, Rita too found school intellectually engaging for the most part. She was actively involved in a number of extracurricular activities and found these intellectually engaging as well. Although she did describe episodes of occasional boredom when her peers were misbehaving or when she had to sit through lessons being re-taught to other students, Rita also indicated that she really enjoyed school and found most of her classes to be intellectually stimulating. Thus, the higher frequency scores for both Gail and Rita were based on transient episodes of boredom and were not considered indicators of general intellectual disengagement on their part.

Leila, Lee, Britany and Ally, by contrast, all indicated, in both interviews and in journal entries, that they found school itself incredibly boring. In terms of intellectual engagement in the classroom, Leila insisted that she had found the academic courses boring. In her words: “It gets boring for me like hearing them talk about something I don’t really relate to...like for science and the solar system...I don’t really relate to that. So I don’t want to hear about it, so it kind of bores me. So I sketch and stuff instead.” She went on to explain that, when she felt bored, it made her feel angry and often provoked her to do “obnoxious things like poke someone”. Another solution to the boredom for Leila was to simply not attend and, according to Leila’s attendance records, skipping classes occurred on a regular basis.

Lee’s decline in intellectual engagement was evident in her overall grade-point average – which dropped seven percentage points from the first to the second semester. As Lee indicated in interview, her second semester had included courses that she found less intellectually engaging. According to her provincial report card results, her pattern was to do well in what Lee saw as the more interesting courses, such as Dance, Family Studies, Applied French and Healthy Active Living. Lee’s provincial report card showed very high learning skills ratings in these courses as well, with the majority of them assessed as being Good or Excellent. Her more academic courses (Geography, Science, Mathematics and English), however, showed a different story. Here, her final grades fell into the low



50% to 70% range. Teacher evaluations of learning skills for these courses, too, were much lower, and ranged from Needs Improvement to Satisfactory. Teacher comments generally stressed that Lee was unfocused in these classes, and was not putting in the effort required to be successful.

When Britany was asked which sentence best described her Grade Nine experience, she selected Sentence A: "School is incredibly boring and soon as I'm old enough, I'm out of here". Although she was quite adamant in her belief that school was boring, she also felt that this was simply the nature of school, and that she was willing to put up with the boredom so that she could finish and perhaps go to college some day. Her journal too seemed to confirm the fact that Britany found school boring. In fact, most journal responses that referred to school described her time in class as boring. In one of her more revealing journal entries, Britany blatantly wrote "Very boring day! Every class sucked. Really nice day, but boring. ONE MORE DAY OF CLASSES! Facebook Update: School sucks."

For Ally, too, the Grade Nine classroom was a boring place. A number of her journal responses addressed the boredom that Ally experienced in high school. Concerning Math class, for example, Ally wrote: "

I know our Math teacher she just writes it down and explains and then she'll talk and talk and talk and still talk the whole entire period which is like an hour and she'll be talking and we'll just be sitting there listening to her.

Ally also engaged in cartoon drawings to describe her feelings of disengagement in the classroom. The caption under one cartoon was:

Trying to pay attention in this class is super boring. ☹️ I can't focus because everything is super boring! She keeps rambling on and on and on. I've got 45 minutes left in class and I just want to get up and leave."

These responses seemed to succinctly capture how Ally had really felt about the Grade Nine experience at the time. It was evident that, although Ally had met many new friends and enjoyed the social aspects of Grade Nine, she found the coursework more burdensome than intellectually engaging.

In their journal responses and/or interview sessions Leila, Lee, Britany and Ally indicated that they tended to be intellectually unengaged in many of their Grade Nine classes. On balance, therefore, these four participants were found most strongly to meet the criteria for intellectual disengagement while at school.

- b) Negative Self-Perception** Self-expressions during interviews and/or in journal entries that were coded as signifying negative self-perceptions on the part of the participants included: indicating an interest in another individual by whom feelings were not reciprocated; sharing an apparent lack of interest in dating; identifying problems with peers on social networking sites; perceiving self as having below-average skills and creative abilities; physical appearance – indicating a low level of self-acceptance; physical changes – identifying and describing deliberate

intentions for self-transformation; attitudinal changes – identifying deliberate intent and purpose in self-transformation; perceiving self as having below-average intellectual ability; perceiving self as being unpopular among classmates and peers; perceiving self as not having many friends and having found it difficult to make friends in Elementary school and in Grade Nine; and perceiving oneself as being bullied and as having had very few friends in Elementary School and in Grade Nine. After data was analyzed and coded, a frequency table was generated for the subcategory “Negative Self-Perception”. These frequencies are displayed in Figure 4.iii as a radar chart to visually represent the frequency results for the “Negative Self-Perception” subcategory.

**NEGATIVE SELF-PERCEPTION (Figure 4.iii)**

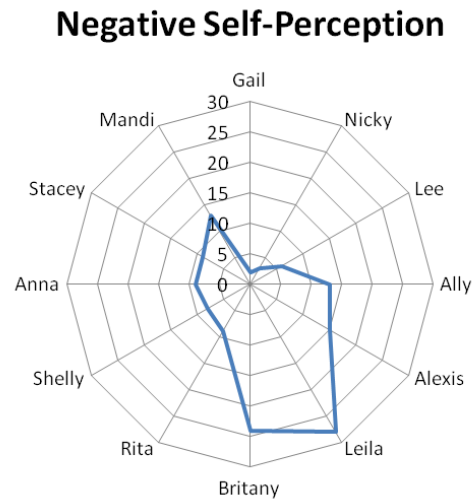


Figure 4.iii indicates that the participants who registered the most indicators of negative self-perception were: Leila (27); Britany (24); Alexis (15); Mandi (13); and Ally (13).

For Leila, her negative self-perception began in Elementary School. Those early years were difficult for Leila, as they had entailed teasing, bullying and social exclusion. According to Leila, “There were loners and then there were the good kids and then the popular kids. I was in the loner group. I got picked on a lot for what I was wearing”. For Leila, the planned antidote to the teasing and social exclusion she had experienced in Elementary School would be to engineer a complete makeover of herself over the summer leading up to Grade Nine. She made deliberate choices to change how she dressed and what music she listened to, as well as to adopt an “I don’t care what you think of me” attitude. Although the transformation apparently made Leila more popular among her peers, it didn’t seem to bolster her self-perceptions. Leila’s journal – which was illustrated by several water-colour self-portraits – was quite revealing. Evocative and compelling, a number of these paintings implied that Leila was unhappy with who she was becoming. In some, the figure was wearing a black mask or covered in droplets of blood. Another was of a figure with her mouth sewn shut, and others were of figures with large, hollow and haunted eyes. Self-deprecating captions accompanying the self-portraits included words or phrases such as: “CRAP” or “She looks like a pig...Ugh” or “Messy”. In spite of Leila’s efforts at self-transformation, these portraits documented the same general sense of self-loathing that Leila indicated she had experienced in Elementary School, and that remained pervasive at the end of her Grade Nine year.

Elementary School for Britany, too, had been very difficult socially. In her first interview session, Britany confided that, as the youngest of two children and with a dad who was in motorcycle gang, she had always found it difficult to find and maintain friendships. When she moved from a large city school to a small rural school during Grade Six, her issues over winning friends were exacerbated. She spoke openly about the bullying and teasing she had had to endure for the last two years in her new Elementary School. In fact, at one point the police force had become involved in an attempt to put an end to the bullying. According to Britany, even that didn't seem to end the bullying. For Britany, therefore, Grade Nine became an opportunity for a new beginning, and she made a concerted effort to change who she was. During the summer before Grade Nine, Britany underwent a dramatic physical and attitudinal transformation. As Britany told it, she began by listening to punk music and, through online research concerning punk world culture, began to alter the way she wore her hair and the clothes she bought. It was at this time that the body piercing began. By the end of Grade Nine, she had a tattoo, and four piercings – the lip piercing she had done herself. It was with this new attitude and her punk-rock style that Britany made her dramatic entrance into Grade Nine, riding to school that first day on the back of her Dad's motorcycle. The pain of Britany's negative self-perceptions was underscored by her desperate attempts to win the respect and acceptance of peers.

Alexis was another participant whose negative self-perception had its roots in her Elementary School experience. Although the recollection was clearly painful, Alexis spoke openly of her identification then as a Special Needs student with a learning disability. She had often been teased and bullied. She recounted that, “It was more of people like making fun of me because I had also gifted kids in my school and they would look down at us, but that’s the only downfall to being in that [Special Needs classroom] and being scared you are going to get picked on”. These had been difficult days, and ones that Alexis had been eager to forget when she moved to high school. According to Alexis, high school offered an opportunity to intentionally reinvent herself, and she made a conscious effort to do just that. Carefully selecting clothing for the first day of school, she wanted teachers to regard her as a dedicated student, and yet she wanted her peers to view her as cool and to accept her for who she was. As the year progressed, Alexis maintained that she found herself most at home with a group of friends whom she fondly called the “weirdos”. It was among this group of friends that Alexis found some of the acceptance and the anonymity that she had been craving.

In her responses to interview questions, Ally also spoke openly about her painful experiences with bullying in Elementary School. Although she really liked her teachers there and often confided in them, she felt rejected by most of her classmates and had no alternative but to hang out with other kids who were also being shunned. She saw herself

as one of an “un-cool” group of girls whom the popular girls did not like and therefore rejected. According to Ally, high school came as a welcome relief from the teasing in Elementary School. Ally spoke of regarding Grade Nine as an opportunity to re-invent who she was and to find new friends. That aspect of high school entry turned out as she had hoped. She met many new friends in high school, and no longer viewed herself as one of the “un-cool” group. Asked to describe her typical day, however, it became apparent that Ally spent a lot of time at home by herself, eating supper alone most evenings. When her chores were done, she would then spend time outdoors with younger neighbourhood children, playing in their yards or in local playgrounds. Ally was also quite forthcoming about her parents’ turbulent marriage. At the time of the interview, her parents were going through a separation, and Ally and her mother were planning to move into a condo. As the only child of a dysfunctional marriage relationship, Ally confided that she carried a lot of the responsibility for household chores such as cleaning and cooking. The fact that her journal revealed apprehensions over losing contact with her friends over the summer was also indicative of Ally’s insecurity.

Mandi’s higher frequency scores in negative self-perception had less to do with her Elementary School experience and more to do with her social life in Grade Nine. A determining moment in Mandi’s life came when her father died of lung cancer. With her mom now working full time as a pharmacist, Mandi spent a lot of time alone. They lived out in the country,

and that made it difficult for her socialize with her friends outside of school hours. Although Mandi's grandparents lived near the school, there weren't many days when she could stay after school specifically to be with her friends. Although she did not have many close acquaintances, Mandi had always had a few very good friends, and Elementary School was a fairly enjoyable time in her life. When it was time to go to high school, however, she was very nervous about the transition and, accordingly, was careful to dress and act so as not to bring unnecessary attention to herself. Socially, Mandi found Grade Nine a little more challenging. She indicated that she had lost touch with some of her Elementary School friends and, although she had found some new friends, she felt lonely. She explained: "I'm not as outgoing as most of my friends. So they are all very loud and talkative and I'm just sort of quiet and sitting around and listening so that can be hard". A number of journal entries centred on a boy who Mandi was interested in, but who did not reciprocate her feelings. She also wrote about staying up all night watching entire seasons of television series such as ER, or of spending hours on Facebook or Stickam. For the most part, Mandi's journal entries outlined an isolated life out in the country where, as an only child in a single parent family, she spent the bulk of her time alone at home. These indicators, although not negative self-perceptions per se, did account for Mandi's higher frequency scores.

Although Lee posted low frequency scores in the "Negative Self-Perceptions" subcategory, her journal did nevertheless reveal instances of



bullying and negative self-image. When Lee was asked in her second interview session to choose one of six sentences to describe her Grade Nine experience (Appendix I), she selected Sentence E: “I have felt a lot of stress about school this year and have regretted going to school most days.” This selection was very telling of the true feelings underlying an outwardly successful Grade Nine year. Lee’s journal entries were perhaps even more revealing. There, Lee revealed that she had a boyfriend – a Grade Ten student in another school – and, although she loved her boyfriend more than she ever thought was possible, the relationship had caused a lot of jealousies among her friends. As Lee explained it, when she spent time with her boyfriend, her friends complained and when she spent time with her friends, her boyfriend complained. Lee had also experienced cyberbullying and teasing on Facebook – bullying that had continued for more than three months on one occasion. In the journal, Lee also discussed insecurities about her body image as well as around her creative abilities. It was when the Dancer of the Year Award went to her friend that Lee began to wonder if she should quit dancing so that she could focus on her Mathematics and Science courses in Grade Ten. She also explained frankly how stressed she was feeling about meeting project deadlines and passing her exams. At one point in the journal, Lee made the painful observation that, even when surrounded by friends and family, she felt an emptiness and very alone in the world. However, since Lee was not able to speak openly about her feelings in the interview sessions,

Lee's overall frequency scores do not fully reflect Lee's negative self-perceptions as revealed in her journal.

Thus, the participants in this study who showed evidence of lower levels of self-acceptance; perceptions of below-average intelligence, skills and creative abilities; and who had also experienced instances of bullying included: Leila, Britany, Alexis, Ally and Lee. According to the criteria selected to typify Ideal Type A, the higher levels of negative self-perception manifested in Leila, Britany, Alexis, Ally and Lee's interview sessions and journal entries put them all at higher risk for academic failure.

#### Provincial Report Card Results

Participants' Ontario provincial report card results also yielded distinguishing attributes for typification. As well as final grades, report cards provide valuable information about credit accumulation and attendance records. In order to graduate with 30 credits (the minimum to qualify for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma) by the end of Grade Twelve, students are expected to earn eight credits in Grade Nine. Six of these credits are for the following compulsory courses: Science, Mathematics, Canadian Geography, English, Healthy Active Living Education and French. Students are also expected to earn two optional credits from among the optional courses offered at their school. Students who fall behind in their compulsory credit accumulation in Grade Nine are considered to be at academic risk, as they are already more likely to leave school without graduating.

For this study, information collected from participants' Ontario provincial report cards included a tally of how many compulsory credits each participant had earned by the end of Grade Nine. It also included a total of courses in which the participant had received a grade of exactly 50%. The rationale for including this latter information takes into account the fact that Secondary Schools in Ontario make a practice of assigning a grade of exactly 50% whenever a student has failed the course, but a credit has been granted for another reason. If a student has genuinely earned 50% in a course, teachers are expected to raise the mark to 51% so that it is clear to anyone who reads the transcript that the student truly passed the course and that the credit was legitimately earned – rather than merely granted to a student who earned a failing grade. Credit accumulation results for each participant were calculated and are displayed in Table 4.4.

Verification of participants' school attendance was drawn from attendance records also outlined in participants' Ontario provincial report cards. The average number of absences per course for the Grade Nine year was calculated for each participant, and may be reviewed in the Table 4.4 "Summary of Report Card Results". The average number of absences per course for all participants (n=12) was 11 classes per course. Poor attendance was defined as students who missed more than an average of 11 classes per course.

According to their report card results (Table 4.4), it was apparent that three of the twelve participants had fallen behind in credit accumulation by the end of their Grade Nine year. These were: Britany, Leila and Alexis. Britany was short one

compulsory credit – the Healthy Active Living Education credit – and was advised that she would need to complete that Grade Nine course during her Grade Ten year. Leila indicated at interview that, since she had been failing her Academic-level Science course, the Guidance Department had moved her to the less-demanding Applied-level Science at mid-semester. However, according to Leila, she found the Applied-level course boring and thus began skipping classes during the second half of the semester. As a result, Leila earned a failing final grade of 37%. Also, since she was not passing her Academic-level Grade Nine Mathematics course and it was too late in the semester to move her into an Applied-level Mathematics course, Leila (with the endorsement of her Guidance counsellor) dropped the compulsory Mathematics course and picked up an optional social science credit in its stead. These changes left Leila short two compulsory credits at the end of her Grade Nine year. Alexis too had fallen behind in credit accumulation by the end of Grade Nine. According to Alexis, she was placed in Essential-level Mathematics and Science courses in Grade Nine because she had been identified as having a learning disability. At the time of this placement, it was not explained to Alexis that the more demanding Applied-level courses are required for acceptance into college. By the time Alexis discovered the mistake, it was too late in the semester to switch from the Essential-level stream to the Applied-level stream, and she also ended her Grade Nine year short two compulsory credits. Both the Grade Nine Science and Mathematics courses would now need to be picked up during Grade Ten instead.

### SUMMARY of REPORT CARD RESULTS (*Table 4.4*)

Participant	Compulsory Credits Earned	Credits Assigned a Grade of 50%	Missed Classes: Average per Course
Gail	6/6	0/8	7.3
Nicky	6/6	0/8	2.4
Lee	6/6	1/8	5.3
Ally	6/6	1/8	7.2
Alexis	4/6	0/8	12.4
Leila	4/6	0/8	15.5
Britany	5/6	1/8	12.25
Rita	6/6	1/8	2.5
Shelly	6/6	0/8	5.3
Anna	6/6	0/8	5.9
Stacey	6/6	0/8	10.1
Mandi	6/6	0/8	10.9

Report card results also indicated that four of the twelve participants were granted credits for courses in which they had actually not earned a passing grade. These students included: Lee, Ally, Rita and Britany. Lee failed her Grade Nine Academic Mathematics course and, although she was granted the credit with a 50% average, her teacher commented on the report card that to repeat the Grade Nine Academic Mathematics course was highly recommended. If Lee were to heed her teacher's advice, she would need to do so during Grade Ten. This would put her behind her peers in expected credit accumulation rates for Grade Nine students. Ally and Rita failed their Grade Nine Academic Mathematics courses, but were granted 50% passing grades. However, their

teachers recommended switching to an Applied-level Mathematics course in Grade Ten. To switch from the Academic stream to Applied-level Mathematics courses in Grade Ten would avoid putting Ally and Rita behind in the expected pace of compulsory credit accumulation. However, the trade-off would be that non-Academic stream courses would not qualify them for university admission down the road. As for Britany, when she was failing her Grade Nine Applied-level Mathematics course, she was offered a credit recovery program at mid-semester that allowed her to salvage her Grade Nine Mathematics credit. Thus, Britany was at risk for failing a compulsory course although, through a special arrangement, she managed to recover that credit after all. Although participants were able to salvage specific credits as outlined above, they were classified as having been at risk. For the purposes of this study, to have come to be at risk for failing or to have actually failed one or more courses was a selected attribute in terms of identification of the ideal type that is at high risk for academic failure.

Attendance records were also employed as an indicator of risk for academic failure. Ideal Type A was partly defined by a pattern of poor attendance – defined as more than an average of 11 missed classes per course. Reliable attendance was defined as less than an average of 11 missed classes per course and was selected as an attribute for Ideal Type B. Participants in this study who were absent for an average of slightly under 11 missed class periods per course during their Grade Nine year were: Mandi (with an average of 10.9 missed classes) and Stacey (with an average of 10.1 missed classes). It should be noted, however, that Stacey indicated in her interview session that a medical

condition had sometimes led to missed school days. Mandi explained that, in her own case, participation in creative pursuits outside of school sometimes meant that she missed classes. Participants who were absent for an average of 11 or more classes per course per semester were: Alexis (with an average of 12.4 missed classes) and Britany (with an average of 12.3 missed classes). Again it should be noted that, in interview, Alexis indicated she was often recruited to look after younger siblings, and sometimes missed school due to this family obligation. Britany, however, indicated in her interviews that she found some classes boring and would skip those classes to be with her friends. Only one participant was absent for an average of 15 classes per course – Leila. In her interview sessions Leila admitted quite openly that she frequently skipped classes and, in fact, her persistent truancy had led to out-of-school suspensions on at least two occasions.

Teacher comments on report cards were also taken into account as sources of information regarding student behaviour and performance in the classroom. The participants whose report cards included at least two negative teacher comments were: Lee, Ally, Alexis, Leila and Britany. For example, teacher comments generally stressed that Lee was unfocused in class, and was not putting in the effort required to be successful. Leila's teachers' comments revealed that Leila's progress was hampered by inconsistent effort and by missed in-class assignments and tests. Assessments of Leila's learning skills recommended improvement in a number of areas, such as ability to work independently, teamwork skills, initiative, organization and homework completion.

Teacher comments for Alexis, Britany and Ally, on the other hand, told a mixed tale. Some comments indicated that Alexis was a serious student who came to class prepared and worked hard. Others, however, suggested that Alexis was inconsistent in her effort, had not worked to her full potential and needed to take more initiative in class. Britany's comments too were both positive and negative. Although, two teacher comments indicated that Britany brought a positive attitude to the classroom and was always focused and on task, others suggested that Britany made poor use of class time, did not complete all her assignments and was inconsistent in terms of her participation in the classroom. Second semester teacher comments for Ally suggested that, although Ally had met course requirements generally, she had done so with great difficulty. Comments also revealed that Ally was inconsistent in her effort and that, if she was to succeed next year, she would need to spend time over the summer reviewing her course work from Grade Nine. To switch from Academic-level to Applied-level courses was another suggestion made by Ally's teachers among her provincial report card comments.

Thus the provincial report cards yielded valuable corroboration concerning participants' credit accumulation, school attendance, and teachers' perceptions of participants' learning skills. Taken together, these revealed that the students at highest risk for academic failure due to falling behind the expected pace of credit accumulation, higher absentee rates and deficiencies in learning skills as identified by their teachers were: Lee, Ally, Alexis, Leila and Britany.



## **Ideal Type A and Ideal Type B**

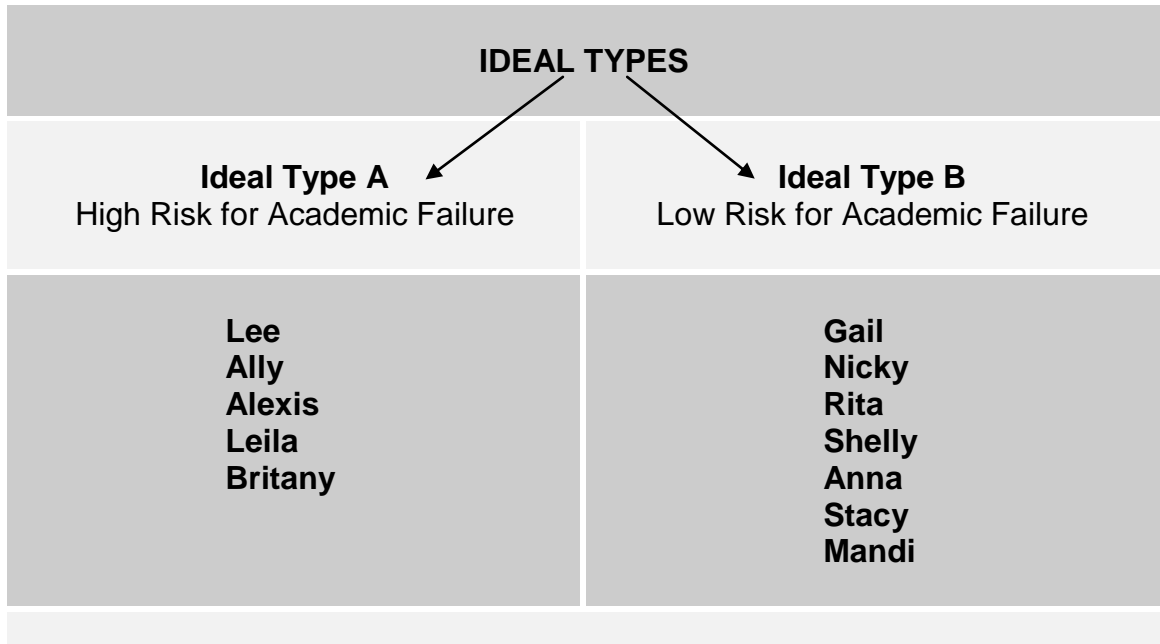
Data gleaned from participants' interviews, journals and Ontario provincial report cards were collated and analyzed to determine which participants possessed selected defining attributes. Based on these attributes, participants were initially sorted into one of two ideal types: Ideal Type A (those considered at high risk for academic failure) or Ideal Type B (those considered at low risk for academic failure). Ideal Type A participants were those students for whom analysis of their interviews, journals and report card results demonstrated the following attributes: evidence of academic and intellectual disengagement, involvement in at-risk behaviours, having fallen behind the expected pace in credit accumulation and exhibiting negative self-perception. Ideal Type B participants were those students who possessed the following attributes: showed no real evidence of academic and intellectual disengagement, were not engaged in at-risk behaviours, were not behind in credit accumulation and exhibited positive self-perception. The names of the students thus classified as Ideal Type A and as Ideal Type B are shown in Table 4.5

### Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking Results

The *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* results were then used to further classify the participants into one of four ideal sub-types: Type A-1; Type A-2; Type B-1; or Type B-2. Ideal Type A participants who scored Above Average (at the 61<sup>st</sup> to 100<sup>th</sup> percentile) on the TTCT fit into Ideal Type A-1 and those who scored Below Average to Average (at the 0 to 60<sup>th</sup> percentile) on the TTCT fit into Ideal Type A-2. Ideal Type B participants who scored Above Average (at the 61<sup>st</sup>

to 100<sup>th</sup> percentile) fit into Ideal Type B-1 and those who scored Below Average to Average (at the 0 to 60<sup>th</sup> percentile) on the TTCT fit into Ideal Type B-2. Participants' TTCT national percentile scores were calculated and are presented in Table 4.6.

#### **PARTICIPANTS – IDEAL TYPES A or B (Table 4.5)**



Seven of the 12 participants scored Above Average on the TTCT, and five of those seven were also at high risk for academic failure. The high-risk participants who also scored higher on the TTCT included: Lee, Ally, Alexis, Leila and Britany.

On the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* (Appendix P), Lee ranked at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile overall, scoring equally well in terms of fluidity, flexibility and originality. These results suggest that Lee was able to produce a large number of spontaneous ideas for each activity, and was also flexible in terms of her thinking patterns. High flexibility scores indicate both having had much experience to

draw from and being highly motivated. Favourable results on the TTCT in terms of originality suggest “an ability to delay gratification or to reduce tension, and usually indicates a nonconforming person with much intellectual energy” (Torrance, 1990). Britany also ranked at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the TTCT and, in particular, scored strongly in fluidity and originality. These results suggested that Britany was able to produce a large number of ideas in carrying out each activity, and was also original in terms of her ability to generate unusual and less-established ideas. Such a high percentile rank for originality may also be suggestive of non-conformist attitudes (Torrance, 1990). Britany’s slightly lower flexibility score, at the 94<sup>th</sup> percentile, was nonetheless indicative of Britany’s flexible thinking and her high intellectual energy.

On the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*, Alexis scored Above Average, at the 74<sup>th</sup> percentile (Appendix P). Alexis’ highest score was in the flexibility category where she ranked at the 82<sup>nd</sup> percentile, with a standard score among the top 16 percent. Alexis’ next highest score was in the originality category, where she ranked at the 72<sup>nd</sup> percentile. This result was Above Average, and spoke to Alexis’ ability to generate ideas that were more unusual and/or less commonplace. Her lowest score was in the fluidity category, at the 64<sup>th</sup> percentile. This was indicative of her ability to produce a slightly above-average number of relevant responses to the various activities on the TTCT.

Ally also scored Above Average at the 74<sup>th</sup> percentile overall on the TTCT (Appendix P). Ally’s highest score was in the originality category, where she ranked at the 89<sup>th</sup> percentile with a standard score among the top 16 percent.

Her score in terms of fluidity was at the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile, and was indicative of her ability to produce a large number of relevant responses in the various activities on the TTCT. However, Ally's score for flexibility was much lower, at the 44<sup>th</sup> percentile and raises the possibility that Ally was somewhat more limited in prior knowledge and/or experience.

**NATIONAL PERCENTILE RANKINGS on the TTCT (*Table 4.6*)**

NAME	NP Ranking: Fluency	NP Ranking: Flexibility	NP Ranking: Originality	NP Ranking: Overall
Gail	53	68	75	66 (Above Average)
Nicky	61	55	75	64 (Above Average)
Lee	97	96	96	98 (Above Average - Very Strong)
Ally	76	44	89	74 (Above Average)
Alexis	64	82	72	74 (Above Average)
Leila	47	77	76	68 (Above Average)
Britany	98	94	98	98 (Above Average – Very Strong)
Rita	33	51	48	42 (Average)
Shelly	12	21	27	16 (Below Average – Weak)
Anna	39	65	61	53 (Average)
Stacey	45	44	66	51 (Average)
Mandi	37	71	66	57 (Average)
NP = National Percentile				

Leila scored Above Average on the TTCT – at the 68<sup>th</sup> percentile overall. Her highest percentile score was 77% in the flexibility category, which was Above Average and was indicative of Leila's flexible thinking habits, intellectual energy

and motivation. Leila's score in the originality category – where she ranked at the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile – was also Above Average and bespoke Leila's ability to produce ideas that were unusual rather than obvious and commonplace. Her score in the fluidity category, however, was at an Average level and indicated that Leila was able to generate an average number of relevant responses for each of the five activities in the TTCT.

The participants who were at low risk for academic failure and who also earned high scores on the TTCT included: Gail and Nicky.

On the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking*, Gail also scored Above Average at the 66<sup>th</sup> percentile overall. Gail's highest score was in the originality category where she ranked at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile – Above Average and reflective of Gail's ability to produce ideas that were more unusual and/or less established. Gail's percentile score in the flexibility category was also Above Average at the 68<sup>th</sup> percentile, and was indicative of Gail's intellectual energy and motivation. Her score in the fluency category, on the other hand, was at an average percentile ranking and indicated that Gail was able to generate an average number of relevant responses for each of the five activities in the TTCT.

Nicky too scored Above Average at the 64<sup>th</sup> percentile overall. Nicky's highest score was in the originality category, where she ranked at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile – Above Average and indicative of Nicky's ability to produce ideas that are more unusual and/or less established. Nicky's score in the fluency category was also Above Average, at the 61<sup>st</sup> percentile, indicating that Nicky was able to generate an above-average number of relevant responses for each of the five

activities in the TTCT. Nicky's percentile score in the flexibility category, on the other hand, placed her in the Average range and was suggestive both of average intellectual energy and motivation levels, and of average rigidity in thinking habits.

The remaining participants who were found to be at low risk for academic failure, but also did not score Above Average on the TTCT were: Rita, Shelly, Anna, Stacey and Mandi. There were no participants found to be at high risk for academic failure who also scored Below Average to Average on the TTCT. Table 4.7 presents the results of the sub-typification process.

#### **Ideal Type A-1: Above Average on TTCT & At High Risk for Academic Failure**

##### Lee (Ideal Type A-1 Participant)

Lee met the criteria for this sub-type in a number of ways. First of all, on the TTCT, she ranked at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile in terms of her creative thinking capabilities. Although she was a dancer, she herself lacked confidence in her skills. She also struggled with Grade Nine Mathematics and Science and would have to choose between repeating the Grade Nine Academic Mathematics in Grade Ten; taking it in summer school; or switching to the Applied-level Mathematics. Since none of these options appealed to Lee, she had decided instead to drop her creative pursuits and focus instead on the Grade Ten Academic Mathematics course next year. At the same time, however, Lee was engaged in a number of at-risk activities such as engaging in under-age drinking parties with her boyfriend. Having been bullied online in Grade Nine, Lee indicated that she felt so stressed most days that she dreaded going to school.

## PARTICIPANTS – IDEAL TYPES A-1, A-2, B-1 and B-2 (Table 4.7)

IDEAL TYPES			
<b>Ideal Type A</b> High Risk for Academic Failure		<b>Ideal Type B</b> Low Risk for Academic Failure	
			
<b>Ideal Type A-1</b> (Above Average on TTCT)	<b>Ideal Type A-2</b> (Below Average to Average on TTCT)	<b>Ideal Type B-1</b> (Above Average on TTCT)	<b>Ideal Type B-2</b> (Below Average to Average on TTCT)
<b>Indicators for Academic/Intellectual Disengagement:</b> Lee      Britany Ally      Leila Alexis	<b>Indicators for Academic/Intellectual Disengagement:</b> Shelly Mandi	<b>Indicators for Academic/Intellectual Engagement:</b> Gail Nicky	<b>Indicators for Academic/Intellectual Engagement:</b> Anna Stacey Rita
<b>Involved in At-Risk Behaviours:</b> Lee Leila Britney	<b>Involved in At-Risk Behaviours:</b> No participants	<b>Not Involved in At-Risk Behaviours:</b> Gail Ally Nicky Alexis	<b>Not Involved in At-Risk Behaviours:</b> Rita      Mandi Shelly      Stacey Anna
<b>Credit Accumulation: Behind Expected Pace</b> Lee      Britany Ally      Leila Alexis	<b>Credit Accumulation: Behind Expected Pace</b> Rita	<b>Credit Accumulation: At Expected Pace</b> Gail Nicky	<b>Credit Accumulation: At Expected Pace</b> Shelly Anna Stacey Mandi
<b>Negative Self-Perception:</b> Lee      Britany Ally      Leila Alexis	<b>Negative Self-Perception:</b> Mandi	<b>Positive Self-Perception:</b> Gail Nicky	<b>Positive Self-Perception:</b> Rita Shelly Anna Stacey
<b>TTCT Percentiles (61% to 100%):</b> Lee      Britany Ally      Leila Alexis	<b>TTCT Percentiles (0% to 60%):</b> No participants	<b>TTCT Percentiles (61% to 100%):</b> Gail Nicky	<b>TTCT Percentiles (0% to 60%):</b> Rita      Mandi Shelly      Stacey Anna
<b><u>High Risk for Academic Failure:</u></b> Lee Ally Alexis Leila Britany	<b><u>High Risk for Academic Failure:</u></b> No participants	<b><u>Low Risk for Academic Failure:</u></b> Gail Nicky	<b><u>Low Risk for Academic Failure:</u></b> Rita Shelly Anna Stacey Mandi
<b>Ideal Type A-1</b>	<b>Ideal Type A-2</b>	<b>Ideal Type B-1</b>	<b>Ideal Type B-2</b>

Overall, given her involvement in high-risk behaviours and her lack of academic and intellectual engagement, Lee met this study's criteria for being at high risk for academic failure.

Ally (Ideal Type A-1 Participant)

Ally scored Above Average on the TTCT at the 74<sup>th</sup> percentile overall and also met this study's criteria for being at risk for academic failure. Ally's socially painful Elementary experience made her transition to high school somewhat challenging initially. However, in Grade Nine, she soon came to see herself as no longer being part of the "un-cool" group. Her marks too improved when she first began Grade Nine. Although Ally managed to achieve A's and B's in a number of her first semester Grade Nine courses, Ally's report card results revealed that she began to struggle academically during the second semester, when her academic average dropped 14 percentage points. For Ally, her more challenging courses (Geography, Mathematics and Science) came in Semester Two. Semester Two teacher comments suggested that Ally demonstrated a lack of knowledge and wasn't consistent in her work efforts. Ally's final grade in Mathematics was 50% and is indicative that, although Ally actually failed the course, the credit was granted to her anyway. Her learning skills too were deemed by teachers as being in need of improvement. One mitigating factor that might explain Ally's academic difficulties during Semester Two was Ally's turbulent home life. At the time of the interviews, Ally's parents were going through a separation and, as a result, Ally carried a lot of the responsibility for household chores such as cleaning and cooking.



Although Ally's first year of high school seemed to be a positive experience for her socially, her journal responses revealed other aspects of how she felt about herself and her Grade Nine experience. Ally's written responses indicated that she didn't have much confidence in her own skills and abilities. She also found school challenging in terms of the workload and in maintaining her level of engagement. A number of journal responses addressed the reality that, for Ally, classes tended to bore her. Several other responses dealt with how overwhelmed and stressed Ally felt about projects that were due, and how worried she was about passing her exams. Certainly Ally's social and academic success were quite revealing in terms of Ally's resilience and her ability to succeed even in emotionally difficult circumstances. However, Ally's negative self-perception, her lack of intellectual and creative engagement and her provincial report card results together are suggestive of academic risk for Ally.

Alexis (Ideal Type A-1 Participant)

Although her interview and journal data suggested that Alexis had a positive self image and was not involved in any at-risk activities, she did fit the Ideal Type A-1 category for a number of other reasons. First of all, she was definitely at risk academically in terms of her lagging credit accumulation. Needing to make up both a Grade Nine Applied-level Mathematics course and an Applied-level Science course, Alexis was already two courses behind her peers. Making up these courses would further cost Alexis in terms of the number and choice of optional credits available in the future. Although Alexis confided that her real interests were Vocal Music and Drama, she also realized that, if she were to

graduate with her peers, she would need to forgo the creative courses that she most enjoyed. Alexis also spoke of having been bullied and teased by her peers because of her status as a Special Needs student with a recognized learning disability. In terms of her academic engagement, although she was not wilfully truant, her attendance was poor for family-related reasons and this put her at risk as well. She indicated in addition that, whenever she missed school, she felt lost academically in the classroom on her return, and found that disorientation stressful as well. Although participation in at-risk behaviours and intellectual disengagement were not risk factors for Alexis, a negative self-perception and bullying by her peers did put her at significant academic risk. Alexis' report card also pointed to her poor attendance and a shortfall in credit accumulation. Overall, Alexis met the criteria for Type A-1 and was deemed at higher risk for academic failure.

#### Leila (Ideal Type A-1 Participant)

Leila was another participant who ranked Above Average on the TTCT, and met the criteria for being at high risk for academic failure. Leila was most forthright in terms of her involvement in at-risk activities and indicated that she skipped school regularly to be with her boyfriend. In her journal, she described all-night campfire parties involving under-age drinking and illegal drugs. At the end of Grade Nine, Leila was behind in terms of her credit accumulation, having dropped her Academic Math course and having failed her Science course. These would need to be made up in the following years and would mean that, although Leila was an avid photographer, she would be unable to take photography as an

optional credit. In interview sessions and in her journal, Leila complained that she found school very boring and that she found it difficult to bring herself to attend. Although she admitted that she felt guilty about her behaviour and was trying to make some constructive changes in her behaviour and attitude, she was finding these goals difficult to accomplish. At the end of her Grade Nine year, Leila was behind in credit accumulation, was academically and intellectually disengaged, and was involved in a number of at-risk behaviours. Leila met the criteria for Ideal Type A-1, and was well on her way to academic failure.

Britany (Ideal Type A-1 Participant)

Although Britany scored at the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on the TTCT, she had little involvement in creative activities, either at school or outside of school. She had enrolled in an optional Vocal Music course first semester, but indicated that she felt she was tone deaf and regretted her choice. Britany was also involved in a number of high-risk behaviours. She was covered with tattoos and piercings – and one of the piercings she had done herself. She also frequently skipped school to be with friends at the smokers' corner and attended un-chaperoned parties that involved underage drinking and the use of illegal substances. In terms of credit accumulation, Britany had been at risk for failing her Grade Nine Applied-level Mathematics course and had been obliged to take a credit recovery course in order to salvage that credit. She was also short a compulsory Healthy Active Living Education course that she would need to make up during her Grade Ten year. According to Britany, although she had had the option of taking Academic-level courses, she had opted for what she saw as the easier Applied-

level courses. Taking Applied-level courses, however, would limit Britany's academic options after high school. Britany also made a number of references to the fact that she found classes extremely boring and could hardly wait for high school to be over.

Falling behind in credit accumulation, indicating academic and intellectual disengagement and participating in a number of at-risk behaviours, Britany met the criteria for Ideal Type A-1, and was well on her way to academic failure.

### **Ideal Type B-1: Above Average on TTCT & At Low Risk for Academic Failure**

#### Gail (Ideal Type B-1 Participant)

Gail met the criteria for this sub-type in a number of ways. First of all, she ranked Above Average at the 66<sup>th</sup> percentile on the TTCT, and also met the criteria for being at low risk for academic failure. By all indicators measured in this study, Gail had had a very successful Grade Nine year. When asked to pick one of six sentences to describe her Grade Nine experience (Appendix I), Gail, without hesitation selected: "I have a good time at school and enjoy all my classes." In general, Gail considered high school to be quite easy and that the work load was very reasonable. Gail's journal entries corroborated her statements during interviews about her Grade Nine experience. They depicted the story of one who enjoyed life generally and had managed well during her first year of high school. In her journal, Gail described good times she had had with friends and concerts she had attended with family members and friends. The journal also conveyed a sense of the busy schedule Gail kept between tutoring, responsibilities at home and school work. There was an easy confidence in both

her writing and her interview sessions, suggesting that Gail was capable of handling her responsibilities and deadlines. Gail's provincial report card results similarly reflected Gail as a capable student who had had a very successful Grade Nine year. Her overall grade point average was 89% with marks ranging between 85 and 95%.

As a participant, who showed little evidence of academic and intellectual disengagement, was not engaged in at-risk behaviours, was not behind in credit accumulation and scored in the Above Average category on the TTCT, Gail quite clearly meets the criteria for Ideal Type B-1 subtype.

#### Nicky (Ideal Type B-1 Participant)

Having scored Above Average on the TTCT and having spoken very positively about her Grade Nine year, Nicky fit the criteria for Ideal Type B-1. Nicky was heavily involved in extracurricular activities, playing on the volleyball team, serving on the student council and playing clarinet in the school band. The aspect Nicky enjoyed most about high school was the new friends she had made and sense of social freedom she had experienced that year. At one point, she stated: "I thought high school was going to be the same as public school but actually it's way more fun [...] I've met a lot of new people and I'm not the type of person that makes friends easy."

Nicky's journal responses similarly indicated that Grade Nine had been a good year. In a number of them, she described socializing informally with her new friends, both at home and at school. She also wrote about how supportive her parents had been, and how much she enjoyed hanging out with her sister.

Although, at the time, Nicky was in the midst of preparing for exams, there were no signs in her journal that she was feeling overwhelmed or even particularly stressed over class project deadlines or upcoming exams. From an academic perspective, Nicky's provincial report card demonstrated that she had had an extremely successful Grade Nine year – with a final grade point average of 90%.

Both in terms of her academic performance and her social adjustment, Nicky's move from Elementary to Secondary Schools had been a highly successful transition and put her at low risk for academic failure.

### **Generating a Theoretical Framework**

Research data from interview transcripts and content analyses of journal entries were initially organized into three subcategories which included: Academic Disengagement – Non-conformance; Intellectual Disengagement; and Negative Self-Perception. These subcategories parallel the risk-factors identified by researchers examining the complex issues around early school leaving in Ontario's Secondary schools during the past decade (Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; King, 2003; Prince-Embury & Courville, 2008; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). These subcategories also proved useful in terms of understanding and identifying attributes pertinent to the derivation of the four Ideal Sub-Types: Ideal Sub-type A-1 (High Creativity and High Risk for Academic Failure), Ideal Sub-type A-2 (Low to Average Creativity and High Risk for Academic Failure); Ideal Type B-1 (High Creativity and Low Risk for Academic Failure); and Ideal Type B-2 (Low to Average Creativity and Low Risk for Academic Failure). Organization of the relevant data results into these four Ideal

Sub-Types helped to determine which participants met this study's research criteria for being both "creatively-inclined" and "at-risk for academic failure".

Research findings ascertained that five of the seven creatively-inclined student participants were at high risk for academic failure, while two were at low risk for academic failure.

The next phase – a key purpose of this study – was to examine the transition strategies that creatively-inclined study participants employed to make their first year of high school a successful one. Research study data for participants who scored Above Average on the TTCT were further scrutinized through the lenses of three new subcategories that emerged from the interview and journal data: Creative Personal Identity; Social Engagement; and Transition Strategies Employed. The intent was to better understand possible links between how creatively-inclined at-risk students manage socially and the transition strategies they employ to manage their first year of high school. Using Atlas.ti, a re-analysis of data for Ideal Type A-1 (High Creativity and High Risk for Academic Failure) and Ideal Type B-1 (High Creativity and Low Risk for Academic Failure) was carried out. The theoretical framework that emerged during this re-analysis process shed light on the ways that creatively-inclined students managed their first year of high school, and identified the more successful strategies that creatively-inclined students employed as well as situational factors that facilitate these more effective strategies.

## Creativity and Identity

An important focus in the research on creativity recently has been on the extent to which a creative individual self-identifies as being creative. According to Jaussi, Randel, and Dionne (2007), “creative personal identity is comprised of the overall importance a person places on creativity in general as part of his or her self-definition” (p. 248). Jaussi, Randel, and Dionne further suggested that the importance placed on creativity helps individuals to define themselves as being creative or not creative, and that this sense of importance originates from one’s own past experiences and opportunities to engage in creativity during the formative years of early adolescence. Although Jaussi, Randel, and Dionne’s research examined problem-solving strategies among creative adults in the workplace setting, their explanation of the development of creative personal identity has served as a helpful construct in this study. Codes were created to capture what each creatively-inclined participant in this study had to say about the role of creativity in the development of her personal identity.

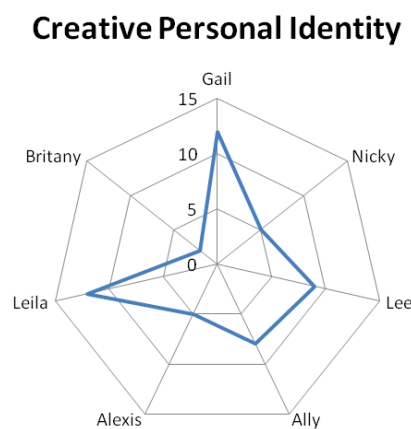
Using Jaussi, Randel and Dionne’s (2007) definition of creative personal identity, participants’ instances of involvement in and identification with creative pursuits, as documented in the interview and journal data, were coded under the subcategory “Creative Personal Identity”. These instances included: engaging in creative pursuits in informal settings e.g. creating music, art, crafts, dance, writing; perceiving self as having above-average skills and creative ability; articulating hopes and dreams for creative development; including among future career options the possibility of a full-time career in the creative arts e.g. music,



dance, drama, visual arts, creative writing; holding an enduring perception of self as an artistic and/or artsy individual; participating in creative group activities during Elementary school and/or Secondary school e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing; and participating in individual creative activities while in Elementary school and/or Secondary school e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing.

Once the data were analyzed and coded, a frequency table was created for the subcategory “Creative Personal Identity”. The frequencies were then used to generate a radar chart to visually represent the frequency findings in this subcategory for all seven of the creatively-inclined participants (Figure 4.iv).

**CREATIVE PERSONAL IDENTITY (*Figure 4.iv*):**



Results in Figure 4.iv indicate that the creatively-inclined participants who were most routinely involved in creative activities and who consistently identified themselves as being artistic were: Gail (12); Leila (12); Lee (9); Ally (8). Gail spent a great deal of time outside of school hours engaging in a number of creative pursuits. Her mom and dad were very supportive of Gail’s creative

interests, and Gail was able to participate in art classes and writing workshops in the community. Her parents also encouraged Gail's creative interests by providing multiple opportunities for Gail and her friends to attend concerts, plays and cultural events. This gave Gail a support group of friends who held similar creative interests as well as family members who facilitated those interests. According to her journal responses, Gail's weekends were often spent hanging out with like-minded friends. Given Gail's support networks and her many opportunities to explore creative interests, it is not surprising that Gail had come to self-identify as a creative person with above-average creative ability and skills.

Leila, too, had come to self-identify as a highly creative person possessing above-average creative ability and skills. Although, in interview, Leila spoke quite negatively about her relationship with her mom and her step-dad and did not feel that they were very supportive of her, their actions seemed to tell a different story. Leila's mom, who was a photographer, who had provided Leila with an expensive camera designed to take high quality photographs. Leila's mom had taught her a lot about photography and had enrolled Leila in a number of photography workshops in the community. Leila had also become a member of deviantart.com – a social networking site for aspiring artists that allows members to post their art and to comment on each other's work. Leila pointed out a number of very compelling photographs that she had taken and posted on that website. Leila had received some very positive responses to her artistic endeavours. This website seemed to provide Leila with an opportunity to chat with other artists and to find an authentic context to showcase her creative

products. It was clear from the interviews and journal responses that, although Leila struggled academically, was bored in school and felt very uncertain about her intellectual abilities, she continued to have an enduring sense of herself as an artist and believed that someday she would be able to make a living at doing what she loved to do best – photography and watercolours.

Lee's frequency scores in the "Creative Personal Identity" subcategory were in part a result of her active participation in dance which began while she was still in Elementary school. With encouragement and support from her mom and dad, Lee was able to participate as an active member of a competitive dance group for a number of years which included dance lessons two evenings a week and competitions on weekends. Lee was also a member of her school's cheerleading squad and participated nationally in cheerleading competitions on weekends. In terms of Lee's self-perception, however, she indicated in her interview sessions that she saw herself as a creative person with very average skills and ability. Lee confided in her journal that she had had a lot of interpersonal turmoil and stress in Grade Nine and "regretted going to school most days". Lee also struggled with Grade Nine Mathematics and Science and, since high grades in these subject areas were very important to her parents, she had begun to place increased emphasis on her academic results in these courses. This emphasis seemed to diminish Lee's interest in developing her creative interests in dance and cheerleading.

Ally's frequency scores in the "Creative Personal Identity" subcategory were very close to Lee's scores. Although Ally had participated in creative

pursuits such as music, dance and creative writing in Elementary School, she was not involved in any extracurricular creative pursuits outside school hours in Grade Nine. Bullying and teasing, which began in her intermediate years, made her unsure of herself and she was no longer as involved in these activities.

Although, Ally took Vocal Music as one of her optional credits in Grade Nine, she indicated that she was uncomfortable singing in front of others, and in retrospect, she regretted having taken that course. Parental support for her creative pursuits also seemed minimal. Ally shared that her parents didn't really have the financial resources to enrol Ally in music lessons in the community. Ally did have access to the Internet, however, and indicated that she was teaching herself how to play the guitar and piano. Nevertheless, her lack of formal music education coupled with a negative experience in her Vocal Music class had caused her to feel that her creative skills and abilities were quite average. Thus, she had decided at the end of Grade Nine that she would not be able to make a career of music.

Nicky's frequency scores in the "Creative Personal Identity" subcategory indicated that Nicky saw herself as a creative person with above-average skills and abilities. She shared that she had been consistently involved in instrumental music since Elementary School. Now, in Grade Nine, she played the trumpet and was an active member of the school band. According to Nicky, her parents had been very supportive of her creative pursuits and had encouraged her to pursue a teaching career in music – something that Nicky was seriously considering. Nicky saw this career option as a great way for her to combine her love for music with the job security of a teaching profession. Nicky's frequency scores in the

subcategory and her statements about her own ability confirmed that Nicky had a strong creative personal identity, based on years of support from her parents and a number of opportunities to pursue her love of music.

Alexis, on the other hand, was very unsure of her creative abilities and skills. In interview, she indicated that although she was involved in a number of creative activities at home, she felt much too insecure to participate in creative activities at the school level where her skills might be more harshly critiqued by her peers. Having been bullied and teased since Elementary school, Alexis was much more reluctant to try new things. Although she spoke of her love of singing and drama and how she had hoped to be able to participate in musicals some day, Alexis maintained that she was simply too afraid that she might forget her lines and that her peers might then have another reason to judge her. Also, given that Alexis' parents had divorced and each had remarried, Alexis seemed to carry a lot of responsibility for child care. She had younger step-sisters and step-brothers in both re-constituted families, and was often asked to help out by picking them up from day care after school and then looking after them until their parents arrived home from work. This left little opportunity for her to explore creative pursuits outside of school hours. It also made it impossible to be involved in extracurricular activities on an ongoing basis. Her lack of opportunity and exposure in terms of creative activities might account for her perception of self as having below-average creative skills and abilities.

With very little family support for pursuing her creative interests, Britany had the lowest frequency scores in the "Creative Personal Identity" subcategory.

Living in a rural community with parents who spent long hours working at physically demanding jobs, Britany spent the majority of her spare time alone at her house, watching old Disney movies or texting her friends. Britany stated in interview that, although she would have loved to take guitar lessons, like her very talented cousin who was currently the lead singer of a well-known Indie band, she had no way to get into town for guitar lessons. She also suggested that she might have been able to teach herself to play the guitar using online podcasts if she had had access to the Internet at home. However, given the remoteness of their location and the lack of Internet access, there was no opportunity for Britany to pursue her interest in acoustic guitar. To stay after school to participate in extracurricular clubs such as the photography club was also problematic for Britany, in that there were no activity buses available after school to provide her with a ride home. According to Britany, her parents believed in hard work and didn't see a lot of value in the arts. They wanted Britany to earn a living and had insisted she take the full-time summer job they found for her working at a greenhouse. Given Britany's lack of family support for her creative pursuits and her isolated rural setting, Britany had had very limited opportunities to explore any of her creative interests. It is not surprising, therefore, that Britany did not self-identify as being creative and viewed herself as having below average skills and creative ability.

Using Atlas.ti to analyze data, it emerged that in the "Creative Personal Identity" subcategory overall, participants (Gail, Leila, Lee and Nicky) who had the support of family and friends and who were given multiple opportunities to

pursue their creative interests tended to have perceptions of themselves as being quite creative and having above average skills and abilities. By contrast, those participants (Britany, Ally and Alexis) who had less opportunity to pursue creative interests and/or who had been teased and bullied by peers tended to have lower levels of confidence in their creativity and to regard themselves as less creative persons.

### Social Disengagement

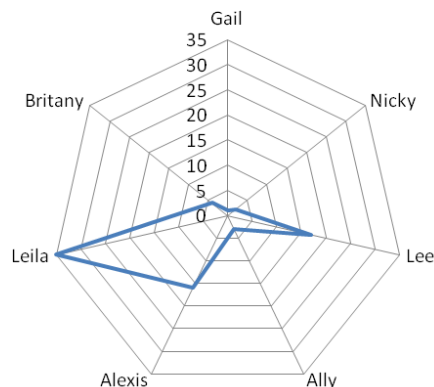
Research on creativity in the past decade has indicated that social traits such as norm-doubting, unconventionality and non-conformance are typically associated with creative individuals (Csikszentimihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Feist, 1999; Griffin & McDermott, 1998; Runco, 2007). These character traits, while positive in the sense that they may lead to more original ideas and products in the workplace setting, can be problematic in terms of how creative students manage and perform in a classroom setting. According to Westby and Dawson (1995), although educators in their study claimed they valued creativity and independent thinking, they tended to describe as ideal those students who were compliant and got along well with others. Certainly, rule-following and co-operation are important to classroom management. Social skills such as an ability to make friends and get along with others at school are pivotal during the transition process into Grade Nine. However, since research data has suggested that creative individuals tend to be less conforming, this study sought to understand social engagement levels of participants during the transition into high school. Indicators of social disengagement that were coded for identification

by Atlas.ti within interview and journal data included: identifying issues with peers in social networking context e.g. gossip, cyberbullying; sharing negative feelings or emotions about socializing with friends e.g. sad, angry, frustrated, lonely; describing negative behaviours with friends e.g. yelling, ignoring; identifying and explaining perceived cause(s) for negative feelings toward friends; perceiving self as being unpopular among classmates and peers; perceiving self as not having many friends and finding it difficult to make friends in high school; perceiving self as being bullied and having very few friends in high school; and perceiving Grade Nine experience as involving too much social drama e.g. gossip.

After data was analyzed, a frequency table was created for the subcategory “Social Disengagement” and the frequencies were then used to generate a radar chart to visually represent the frequency distribution for creatively-inclined participants in this study (Figure 4.v). Findings in Figure 4.v show that the creatively-inclined participants linked with the greatest number of indicators of social disengagement were: Leila (35); Lee (17); and Alexis (16).

### **SOCIAL DISENGAGEMENT (*Figure 4.v*)**

#### **Social Disengagement - School Friends**





Leila, Lee and Alexis provided strong evidence in their interviews and journal responses that Grade Nine had been a struggle for them socially. In interviews, Leila described her transition experience into high school as a social “disaster”. Because she had been teased and bullied in Elementary school, Leila’s entry plan for high school involved a complete make-over. She began to listen to “emocore” music (a style of music that is a combination of punk music and hardcore rock); swapped her trendy name-brand clothing for a more non-conformist style of dress; spiked her hair and dyed it jet black; and donned dark eye make-up. Although the dramatic changes in her physical appearance did help her initially to find a whole new group of school friends, this benefit came with a cost. According to Leila, in the high school culture, students who are seen as being “emo” are accused of having fake personalities, of engaging in self-harming activities such as cutting, and of being depressed and idealizing suicide. Although Leila did not see herself in this way, she came to be lumped together with the unpopular emo students – a subculture that has endured a lot of bullying across high school populations in the past five years. This caused Leila to feel even more desperate to spend time with her “emo” peers where she felt some measure of acceptance. In fact, Leila began skipping classes so that she could spend additional time with these new friends – including a new boyfriend. Her truancy, in turn, led to suspensions and put her at serious academic risk. In retrospect, Leila wished that she could have a chance to do Grade Nine over again and came to the final interview armed with three self-help books. She confided that, over the summer months, she intended to change her life again so

that Grade Ten would be a better year. In her journal too she wrote, “Now is my time for fixing my mistakes.” Evidently, for Leila, her first year in high school was about trying to find a place where she felt at home – even if that meant joining the relatively unpopular emo subculture. However, it seemed evident to Leila, in retrospect, that even among this group of school misfits and fellow social outcasts, she felt like an outsider and alone. As it turned out, Leila’s struggle for social belonging in her Grade Nine year proved costly for her, both emotionally and academically.

Alexis was another creatively-inclined student who struggled socially in Grade Nine. Like Leila, Alexis too had decided to re-invent herself so that she would not be alone in high school as she had been in Elementary School. Alexis’ transformation, however, had less to do with physical change than with changes in her attitude and her public persona. According to Alexis, she struggled to fit in, both at school and at home. Since her parents’ divorce and re-marriage, Alexis had become the oldest child in two households. She confided that she lived primarily with her mother and step-dad up until four months ago – at which point she was finally allowed to spend some weekends with her dad and step-mother. According to Alexis, she had been previously told by her step-mom and dad that she was too hyper, and a “bad influence” on her younger step-sisters in her dad’s home, and therefore not welcome there. Alexis described it this way:

“Like my step-mom she never really wanted me in the house because of the little kids and that I was teaching them wrong that I was being too hyper and then my step-sister started doing it like

me, so my step mom didn't want me around. So I said to myself, 'Next year I am going to change, I do want to see my family and I want to be a part of them and I don't want to just be like, pushed out and not have like my family anymore which I was not like. I sit in my room and cry when I'd ask my dad to go see him, and he'd say no, and I would sit there and cry.'

Although Alexis had used this family-based exclusion as a primary reason to make changes in herself, she admitted that this had not been the only reason. According to Alexis, teachers and students in Elementary school had not liked her either and had told her that she was "too hyper". Alexis' solution had been to re-invent herself over the summer before Grade Nine, and to learn to be "less hyper". Asked how she set about doing that, she stated openly:

I focused on being more calm and saying more okay, this is what I would do last year, and this is...wasn't...I shouldn't do cause...I wanted to change and if you want to change you have to always be thinking about it, you can't just stop thinking about it for a matter of seconds or minutes because like, if you forget about it and you already have the habit of being that person and you're trying to not be that person you...I don't know, you just consciously, you're thinking this is me, but you don't want to be that person anymore.

According to Alexis, the transformation had been successful in that she was allowed to visit her dad again and to spend weekends with his new family. At school too, Alexis found new acceptance among teachers, who saw her as well-behaved and a hard worker. The bullying by her peers, however, did not change. In her journal, Alexis noted:

Today I found out that a rumor has spread about me and they are saying that I am a bisexual and a whore. But it doesn't bother me because I know I'm not and they are just trying to get on my nerves. No matter what, I'm not going to change to what they want me to because I am not that girl.

This poignant response spoke loudly to the fact that, even with the dramatic changes she had made in her interactions with others, Alexis was still not able to find the acceptance at school that she so desperately wanted.

Although Lee had the second highest frequency scores in terms of social disengagement among the creatively-inclined participants in this study, her scores were not the result of a change in her social interactions or a dramatic self-transformation. Lee had had a positive experience in Elementary School and was excited about meeting new friends in high school. When asked in interview if she had viewed Grade Nine as an opportunity to re-create herself, Lee was adamant that she had been happy with her social life. Yet, when asked how she felt about her Grade Nine year in retrospect, she indicated that it had been fraught with “too much drama.” In interview sessions, Lee hinted at issues she was having with her peer group; however, in her journal responses, she was much more forthcoming. In one of these she wrote: “This girl put things in her facebook status about me for about 3 months, no doubt about it it was the hardest 3 months even now girls are still mean, looking at someone makes them freak out and call you names? I don’t even get it.” A number of Lee’s journal responses referred to the online bullying she was experiencing, and to how difficult this social drama had made life for Lee at school. In Lee’s case, it was her frustration with online bullying that accounted for her feelings of social disengagement, and thus for her higher frequency rates in this subcategory.

Although Britany’s frequency scores in the “Social Disengagement” subcategory were much lower than those of Leila, Alexis and Lee, her negative

interactions with peers were much more intense and volatile. In one of her journal responses, Britany wrote: “Got into a fight at lunch and sprained by thumb punching. Haha.” In interviews too, Britany described herself as being “not an overly friendly person. I’m kinda shy and mean sometimes. I’m not very approaching as people tell me.” Britany also confessed that she didn’t get along well with a number of her teachers. Britany also resorted to disruptive behaviours when she was bored in the classroom. Although there were only a few references made to incidents of negative social interactions with peers, these were dramatic enough and unusual enough to be examined more closely and served as evidence of social disengagement, rebellion and non-conformance on Britany’s part during her first year of high school.

In terms of social disengagement, Ally and Nicky were two participants who offered very little evidence about conflict with their peers and/or teachers. Ally, who had been bullied and teased in Elementary School, seemed to have left all that behind when she came into high school. According to Ally, she had made a lot of very good friends: “I have friends that don’t judge me for my looks but they accept me for who I am.” Although Ally spoke highly of these friends, her journal revealed that she actually spent a lot of her time home alone or playing outdoors with younger neighbourhood children – not with school friends. The journal entries thus served as a counter-balance to the positive assertions Ally offered in her interview sessions about the number of good friends she now had. Nicky too seemed to indicate at interview that she had managed to find a lot of friends in high school. Although Nicky described herself as “not the type of

person that makes friends easily” when she entered high school, she had been able to find a number of new friends who were like her and had the same interests. In her journal, however, Nicky revealed that she was nonetheless quite concerned about how strong the bonds actually were between her and these new friends. In one response, she wrote: “My friends are really cool people. But I’m worried that over the summer people are gonna forget about me. That would really suck. Those are my concerns/fears.” This statement was indicative of Nicky’s perception of her newfound friendships as being very important to her, and yet perhaps tentative in nature. This seemed to corroborate Nicky’s perceptions that she was not the type of person who made friends easily.

Of the seven creatively-inclined participants in this study, Gail seemed to have the most success socially. According to Gail, she had been able to maintain her friendships with her Elementary school peers and also to create a number of new friendships in Grade Nine. At interview, Gail described herself as having had three very close friends in Elementary school, and once she transitioned into Grade Nine, to have found more friends – new friends who seemed to have similar interests in art and Anime. Besides school friends, Gail was regularly involved in a youth group at her church, and that seemed to provide long-lasting friendships outside of the school setting as well. Between what Gail stated during interview sessions and what she revealed in her journal responses, there did not seem to be any real impediments to Gail’s social engagement during her Grade Nine year.

As the frequency scores in the “Social Disengagement” subcategory seem to indicate, Leila, Lee and Alexis had the most difficulty finding and maintaining friendship relationships in Grade Nine. Leila was teased because of her identification with the emo subculture, whereas Lee and Alexis were bullied by peers online. Although Britany’s raw frequency scores were not as high in the Social Disengagement subcategory, her journal did reveal concerning instances of negative social interactions that involved physical altercations with classmates. Ally and Nicky too indicated in their journals that, although they had friends, they weren’t sure if they could depend on these friends to remain loyal over the summer months. Of the creatively-inclined participants in this study, therefore, only Gail seemed genuinely socially engaged and confident in her friendship relationships at school.

### Transition Strategies

Although research studies that examine the transition from Elementary into Secondary School have tended to focus on academic performance rather than on psychological correlates, research studies on early school leaving have found that early school leavers most frequently cite psychosocial issues as reasons for their disengagement and early leaving (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Turner, 2007). In this study as well, students seemed to focus on psychosocial issues rather than on academic performance in discussing their transition into Grade Nine. Thus the subcategory “Transition Strategies Employed” was created to assess the

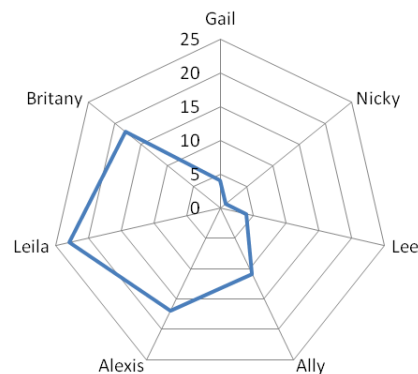
importance that participants placed on psychosocial dimensions of the transition process.

Characteristics of the “Transition Strategies Employed” subcategory that were coded in Atlas.ti to search the interview and journal data included: identifying changes in peer group and peer involvement over time; describing deliberate intentions for self-transformation e.g. clothing, piercings, hair style and colour; noting positive outcomes of physical transformation; noting negative outcomes of physical transformation; identifying deliberate intent and purpose in self-transformation e.g becoming more outgoing, or compliant; noting positive outcomes of attitudinal transformation; and noting negative outcomes of attitudinal transformation.

After the data were analyzed and coded, a frequency table was created for the subcategory “Transition Strategies Employed”. The frequencies were then used to generate a radar chart that visually represents the frequency results for the subcategory “Transition Strategies Employed” (Figure 4.vi).

#### **TRANSITION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED (*Figure 4.vi*)**

**Transition Strategies Employed**





The frequency distribution in Figure 4.vii indicates that the creatively-inclined participants who devoted the most extensive time and effort to devising and implementing psychosocial strategies in order to improve their transition from Elementary to Secondary school were: Leila (23); Britany (18); Alexis (17); and Ally (11). One transition strategy that Leila, Britany, Alexis and Ally all employed was to deliberately disassociate themselves from their Elementary school cohort, and to make a concerted effort to find a new set of friends in Grade Nine. Such a strategy was certainly understandable, since all four participants had been bullied in Elementary school and they were anxious that this not happen again in their new school. For Britany, Leila and Alexis, to attract a new group of friends meant the need to transform themselves completely. For Britany, Grade Nine became an opportunity for a new beginning, and she made a concerted effort to change who she was. Britany began her transformation by listening to punk music, and through online research concerning punk world culture, beginning to alter the way she wore her hair and the clothes she bought. According to Britany, "I would listen to a song and I would look up the artist and see how they dressed and I would try and be like them and just like tried out new stuff over the whole summer and eventually picked who I was." With the physical transformation, there also came a change in attitude, or as Britany expressed it:

My personality did change a lot so I'm told...and I didn't really realize it until people sort of said, "You are acting a lot different" and stuff...and it was all for the better...cause I heard people tell me, "Well, you are much more pleasant now and you have friends" and stuff like that.

By the end of Grade Nine, Britany had a whole new set of friends and, according to her, the bullying she had experienced in Grades Seven and Eight was finally at an end.

Leila too spent the summer transforming herself. Since she was already a fan of emo-core music, she used the Internet to help her make clothing selections and hairstyle choices that accurately portrayed the emo subculture and lifestyle. As a part of her transformation, Leila also made a deliberate lifestyle change. She became an advocate of animal rights, switched to a vegetarian diet and became a member of People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). This lifestyle change put Leila in touch with a group of likeminded friends. Although her physical transformation and lifestyle changes did not put an end to the teasing Leila had experienced in Elementary school, it did lead to connection with a whole new peer group in Grade Nine where Leila felt accepted and appreciated, as well as to new friendships.

For Alexis, the transformation she engineered had very little to do with changing the way she dressed, and much more with changing the way she behaved. During the summer before Grade Nine, Alexis had come to the conclusion that the teasing she experienced in Elementary school stemmed from her identification as being “hyper”, not only by her teachers, but also by her parents and friends. As Alexis told it, “I used to be the one who would do anything I could. I was a rebel, and I was actually labeled by my teachers as someone who had ADHD because of how I acted.” Alexis set about to very consciously focus on acting more settled by engaging in self-talk designed to

calm herself. She also made a deliberate effort to find friends who were quieter and less adventurous than she was. She even enlisted their help and asked them for strategies that might help her to become more sedate. Although adoption of these strategies seemed to help her at home and did provide Alexis with access to a new group of friends, they did not put an end to the teasing that she initially experienced in Elementary school. Online harassment continued to be an issue for Alexis during Grade Nine.

Ally's self-transformation was like that of Alexis in that it also focused on changes in attitude as opposed to physical change. Different from Alexis, however, Ally felt that the teasing she experienced in Grade Eight had to do with the fact that she was too quiet and too compliant. She had decided that a more assertive attitude might be the best solution to the bullying, and that she needed to become much more outgoing and social in order to find acceptance among her peers in Grade Nine. In retrospect, Ally noted, "In previous years I was always shy and never got to really express myself as who I am, but now that I'm in Grade Nine, I express myself more." As a result, Ally felt that she had been able to find new friends who were more like her and had the same interests as Ally did in music and art. Ally derived a lot of comfort from these new-found friendships, and felt that the teasing she had experienced in Elementary school was well behind her.

Lee also saw Grade Nine as an opportunity to meet new friends and to find people who shared her interests in dance and choreography. Although Lee had not set out deliberately to make new friends, nor had she seen a need for

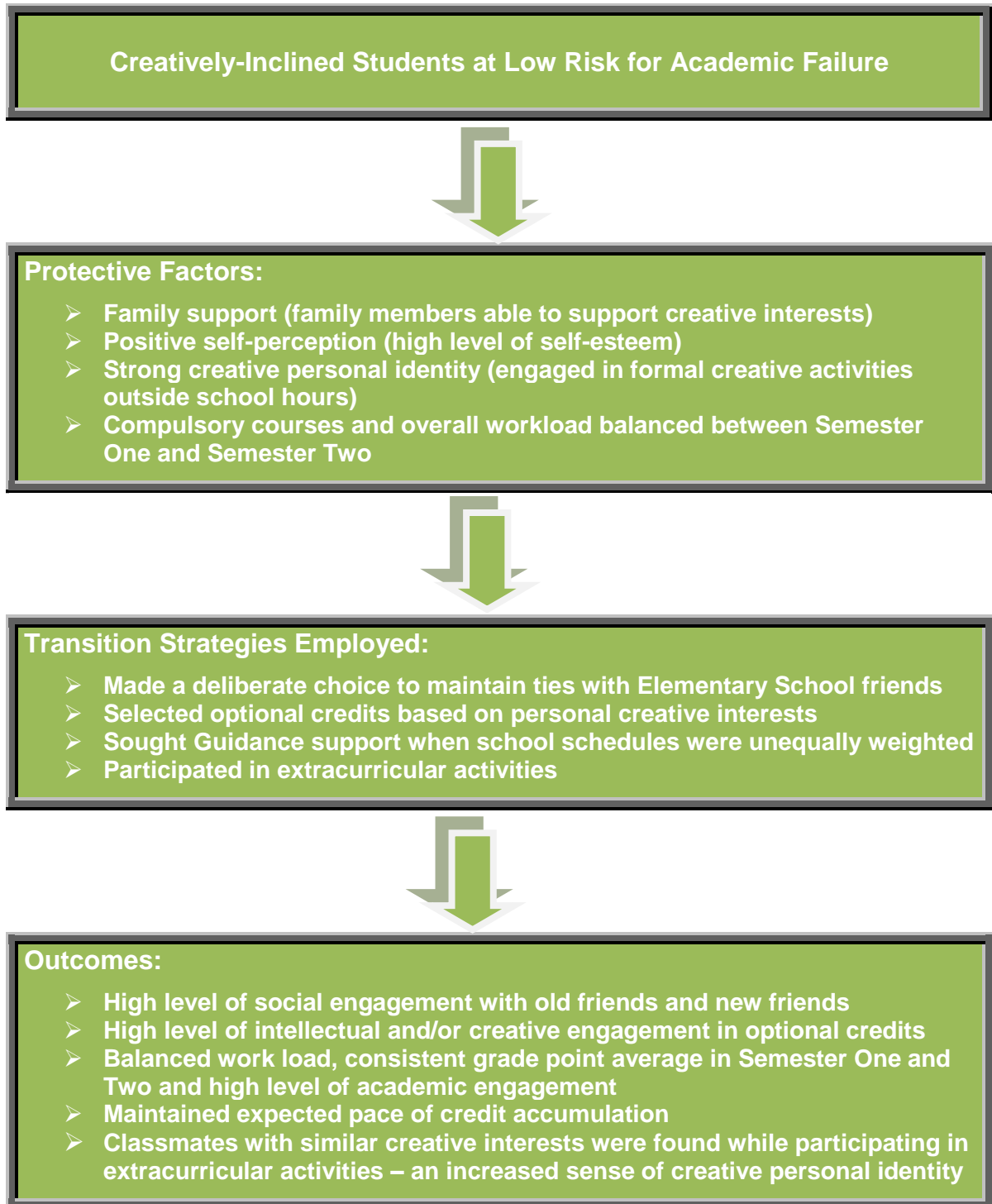
self-transformation, she was able to establish a number of new friendships in high school. Joining the cheerleading squad, she found herself with a group of friends who were also interested in dance and, in fact, a number of these new friends had also selected Dance as their optional credit. Nicky and Gail similarly did not see a need for self-transformation per se, and had not made a conscious effort to change the way they dressed or behaved. Even so, both Nicky and Gail noted that one of the aspects of Grade Nine that they most appreciated was the opportunity to meet new friends who shared their creative interests.

Clearly, the strategies that the participants in this study employed in their transitioning from Elementary to Secondary school were entirely psycho-socially oriented. Britany and Leila made deliberate changes in their physical appearances, their attitudes and in their lifestyle choices. Transition strategies that Alexis and Ally employed had less to do with changes in their physical appearances, but focused strongly on attitudinal changes. With these changes came a whole new set of friends and a new peer group, for Alexis and Ally both. Lee, Nicky and Gail, on the other hand, did not deliberately set about to change their attitudes, their physical appearance or their peer group. Nonetheless, they too succeeded in finding new friends who had similar creative interests, and they continued to see real value in those new friendships.

### **Creatively-Inclined Students at Low Risk for Academic Failure: Integrated Model**

A model (presented in the form of a flow chart) was designed to integrate the theoretical relationships among the coded subcategories in this study. The integrated model serves as a framework to explain how the creatively-inclined

**Integrated Model for Students at Low Risk for Academic Failure (*Figure 4.vii*)**



participants in this study who ended Grade Nine at low risk for academic failure managed their first year of high school. The Integrated Model for Students at Low Risk for Academic Failure (Figure 4.vii) includes: a listing of protective factors that facilitated a successful transition; transition strategies that academically successful students in this study employed; and the outcomes of those transition strategies.

A number of protective factors were identified among the creatively-inclined students in this study who were at low risk for academic failure at the end of their Grade Nine year. For example, creatively-inclined students who had a successful school year tended to have family members who supported their creative interests and encouraged them to engage in creative activities, such as music, art and dance lessons, outside of school hours. Those students who were involved in formal creative activities outside school hours also tended to have a stronger sense of creative personal identity. Another protective factor the successful students held in common was a balanced course schedule in which Semester One and Semester Two were equally weighted in terms of compulsory courses, levels of difficulty and workload. This meant that they weren't struggling academically in one of the semesters more than in the other, and they remained academically engaged throughout the school year.

In terms of the transition strategies employed, the creatively-inclined students who were successful stated in their interviews that they had made a concerted effort to maintain ties with their friends from Elementary School. They contacted each other before the first day in Grade Nine and made arrangements

to meet before school or else to eat lunch together. They also stayed in contact with each other throughout the school year. This strategy led to an increased sense of social belonging which began on the first day of school. Another successful transition strategy employed by successful students was to engage in extracurricular activities. Those students who did so stated that these pursuits allowed them to meet new friends who tended to share similar interests. This, in turn, led to higher levels of social engagement. Another transition strategy that worked well for some of the successful students was the utilization of Guidance counsellors at their high schools. Those students who felt that the course workload on their schedules was not equally weighted between Semester One and Semester Two made appointments with Guidance counsellors to have their schedules changed. A balanced schedule kept the overall work load more manageable from semester to semester, and led to more uniform academic success. In choosing optional courses, although the successful students sought the advice of parents, friends and teachers, they tended to select courses based on their own creative interests – not based on what their friends were taking or on what their parents felt they ought to take. This strategy led to an increase in intellectual engagement and/or creative engagement with the optional courses chosen by the successful students.

In summary, the successful creatively-inclined students tended to experience a stronger creative personal identity, higher levels of social engagement while at school, a consistent grade point average and/or level of

academic success, and higher levels of intellectual and/or creative engagement in their optional courses.

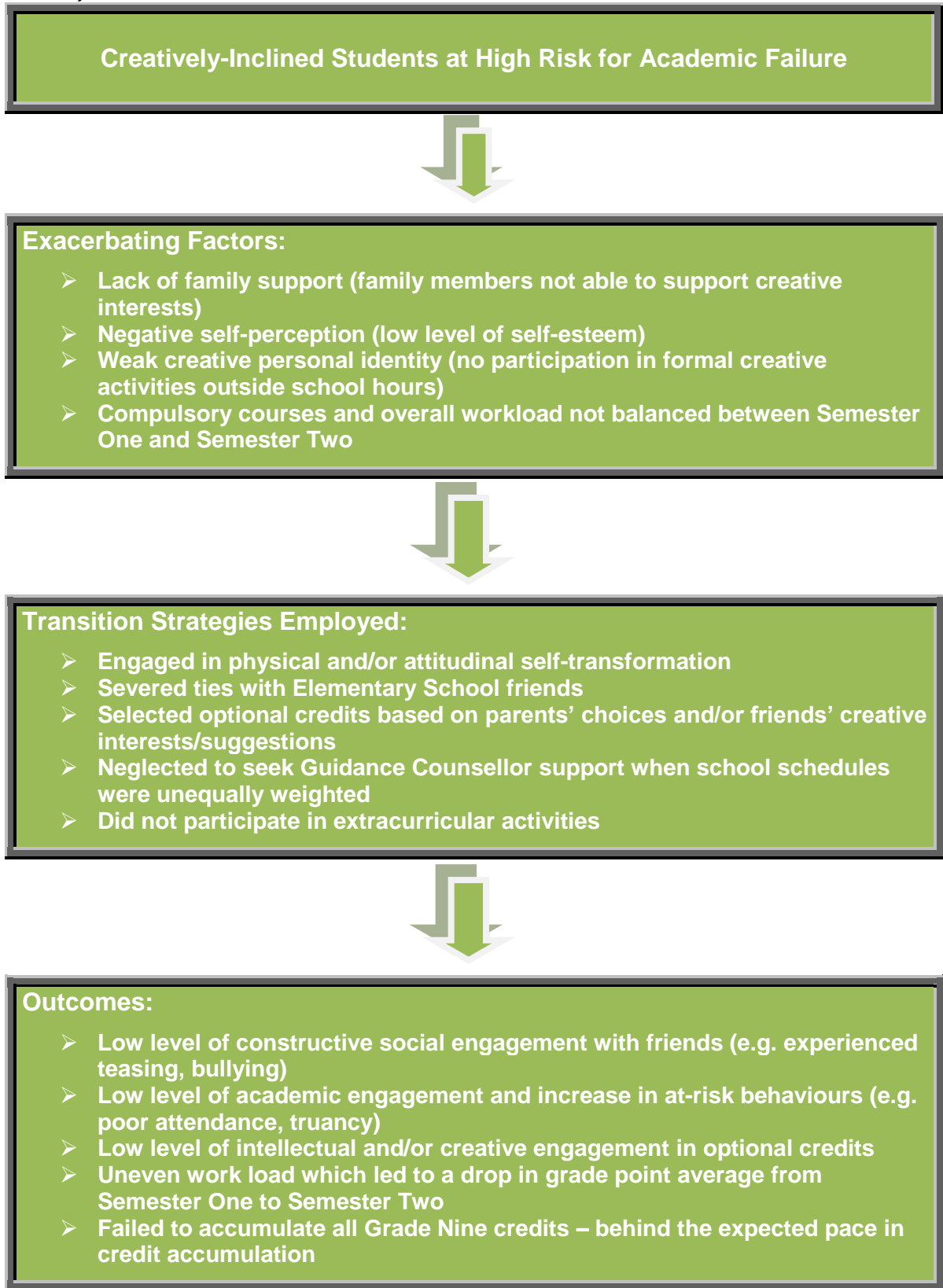
### **Creatively-Inclined Students at High Risk for Academic Failure: Integrated Model**

An integrated model (presented in the form of a flow chart) was also designed to serve as a framework to outline how those creatively-inclined participants in this study who ended Grade Nine at high risk for academic failure managed their first year of high school. The Integrated Model for Students at High Risk for Academic Failure (Figure 4.viii) includes: a listing of exacerbating factors which mitigated their successful transition; transition strategies that students who were at high-risk for academic failure in this study employed; and the outcomes of those transition strategies.

A number of factors were identified that seemed to exacerbate the level of risk for academic failure among the creatively-inclined students in this study. For example, students who experienced a less-than-successful school year tended to have family members who were not able to support their creative interests. Some of these parents worked long hours at demanding jobs and did not have the time or the financial resources to support the creative pursuits of their children. Other participants split their time between two families – living one week here and another week there. For reasons such as these, participants who were at higher risk for academic failure tended not to be involved in activities such as music lessons or art classes. This lack of participation in formal creative pursuits outside school hours apparently correlated with a decreased sense of creative



**Integrated Model for Students at High Risk for Academic Failure (Figure 4.viii)**



personal identity. Another exacerbating factor that creatively-inclined students who ended Grade Nine at risk had in common was an unbalanced course schedule. Semester One and Semester Two were unequally weighted in terms of number of compulsory courses and therefore in levels of difficulty and workload. Students soon began to struggle academically during the more challenging semester, and grade point averages dropped significantly. Other at-risk students failed one or more courses and, by the end of their Grade Nine year, had not met their expected credit accumulation rate. The lack of academic engagement was more pronounced among this group of students and, for some, led to truancy and suspensions.

In terms of the transition strategies employed, the at-risk students had made a deliberate choice to abandon their Elementary school friends and to find a new group of friends in high school. Some spent the summer transforming themselves physically by researching alternatives online first, selecting a desired look and then changing hair and clothing styles accordingly. Others made a concerted effort to adjust their public persona, either by becoming less hyperactive, or else by becoming more animated and vocal. These students came into Grade Nine projecting a new look and/or a newly adopted personality. Although this transition strategy seemed successful initially, it also became problematic. For some, it led to participating in at-risk behaviours as they tried to fit in with their new peer group. For others, association with an unpopular

subculture brought with it a social exclusion and even bullying. This identification, in turn, led to higher levels of social disengagement among the at-risk students.

A transition strategy that was not employed by the at-risk students, was to seek assistance from Guidance counsellors. When the at-risk group received their schedules during the Grade Nine orientation day, a number of them noted that their schedules were not equally weighted in terms of work load. However, they failed to actively address the issue and did not make appointments with Guidance counsellors to have their schedules changed. When asked why they did not, they stated that it was too difficult to get an appointment, or else they hadn't realized that a change in schedule was even an option. Others said that they were openly discouraged by teachers and administrators from asking to switch classes. In the end, an unbalanced schedule meant an unmanageable work load in one semester, which led directly to academic failure for most of the at-risk students in this study. Although Guidance counsellors did intervene in two instances when it became evident that these students were failing courses, students who were at high risk for academic failure did not tend to seek out their services at semester start.

Another transition strategy that at-risk students had employed and that did not lead to a successful outcome involved their criteria for optional course selection. Whereas the successful students tended to select optional courses based on their own creative interests, the at-risk students were prone to select optional courses based on what their friends were taking or what their parents felt they should take. According to participants, this strategy led to a decrease in

intellectual engagement and/or creative engagement in the optional courses for the unsuccessful, creatively-inclined students.

To summarize, the creatively-inclined students who were at high risk for academic failure tended to: spend less time in creative pursuits outside school hours and to experience a weaker sense of creative personal identity; had abandoned friendships formed in Elementary school on the presumption that new friendships could be established in Grade Nine and experienced lower levels of social engagement at school; saw a significant drop in grade point average and/or academic failure in part due to an unbalanced workload; experienced lower levels of intellectual and/or creative engagement in their optional courses; and a showed tendency to engage in high risk behaviours in order to satisfy their need for acceptance in new peer groups. By contrast, those creatively-inclined students who experienced a successful Grade Nine year had a strong sense of creative personal identity developed through creative pursuits outside of school; had maintained friendships formed during their Elementary school; selected optional courses based on their creative interests rather than on the preferences of others; accessed Guidance counsellors to better balance their course schedules; and participated in extracurricular activities that served as a venue in which to meet new friends who shared their interests and to foster a greater sense of social engagement.

## 5. DISCUSSION

You have been told to  
“go with the flow”  
but as you know  
from your studies  
there is no flow,  
nor is there actually  
any coming or going.  
These are merely  
helpful concepts.

Cohen (2006)

The purpose of grounded theory research is generation of new or refined theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), theory consists of “a set of well-developed categories (themes, concepts) that are systematically inter-related through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework,” and this framework can thus be employed to explain relevant social phenomena (p.22). Expanding on Strauss and Corbin’s moderately positivist understanding of theory-building, Charmaz (2006) attached an interpretive dimension, suggesting that, depending on the nature of the research study, it can also be appropriate to regard theory as a set of inter-related concepts designed to enable understanding of the correlates of a relevant social phenomenon. It is this interpretivist approach to theory-building that resonates with my predispositions as a researcher. Thus, the following discussion does not offer explicit theoretical propositions – rather, “these are merely helpful concepts” (Cohen, 2006). The theoretical framework is presented here, not as an explanation of why these concepts exist but to draw together concepts and to explain how they are connected and interrelated. In accordance with the research question that gave

shape to this study, this discussion traces the linkages between participation in creative activities and creatively-inclined students' perceptions of themselves. From there, it makes connections between creatively-inclined students' perceptions of themselves and their academic outcomes in Grade Nine. In addition, it maps out transition strategies that creatively-inclined study participants have undertaken to manage their first year of high school. Finally, it proposes an integrated model for transitioning creatively-inclined students at-risk for academic failure into their first year of high school.

### **Integrated Discussion of Concepts**

#### **Concept of Self-Identity and Creativity**

One concept that emerged from the data analysis of this study and that is also recognized in the research literature is the influence that self-identity exerts over the expression of innate creative inclinations. In addressing the question of how creatively-inclined students navigate a standardized curriculum in Grade Nine, it is helpful to trace the link between how creatively-inclined participants in this study perceived themselves to be, and the creative activities that reinforced those self-views. Research studies have demonstrated that adolescents typically engage in a series of role rehearsals, and it is these role rehearsals that provide them with valuable understandings of who they are becoming (Lesko, 2001; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005, Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008; Ungar, 2004). The creatively-inclined participants in this study who thought of themselves as being highly creative and as having above-average creative ability and skills were those students who, on a consistent basis, engaged in creative

activities outside of the school setting. They tended to have family members who supported their creative interests and made it possible for them to pursue available creative opportunities. Participating in creative activities from an early age seemed to help participants define themselves as being creatively-inclined. They tended more strongly to see themselves as naturally creative individuals, and described themselves more definitively as being creative and/or artistic. This finding is consistent with the view that a student's sense of creative personal identity originates from engagement in creative activities during the formative early years (Jaussi, Randel, & Dionne, 2007).

It is noteworthy that the creatively-inclined participants in this study who had the strongest sense of creative personal identity were also at lowest risk for academic failure. As researchers have come to understand that individual attributes and personal qualities are highly contextual in nature, one core mechanism that has been consistently identified in resiliency research is the development of mastery of a skill or of self-efficacy (Prince-Embury & Courville, 2008). According to Dweck (2007) students who have developed a strong sense of self and have come to understand creativity as a growth process rather than as a fixed entity are much more likely to push through difficult circumstances and setbacks. Similarly, having routinely taken advantage of opportunities for creative skill development apparently served as a protective factor for the creatively-inclined participants who were at low risk for academic failure. The self-efficacy and resiliency fostered by creative activities may account in part for their ability to

push through difficult transition times and to achieve academic success as a result.

Having families that supported their creative interests also served as a protective factor for these students, in that they were not as dependent on institutions such as the Secondary school to fulfil important functions in creative skill development and creative identity formation. A number of research studies similarly stress the important role families play in influencing creative development (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Spooner, 2002). However, because it is difficult to intervene in families so as to shape the unfolding of children's talent, researchers into creativity support a focus on other elements of the developmental equation over which there is more ready potential for influence. These include the role that educational institutions can play in engendering creative development in the classroom and in orchestrating extracurricular activities (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Eisner, 1987; Greene, 1995). Educational institutions have potential to act to even the playing field for those creatively-inclined students who are not fortunate enough to have the support of family members. Thus, schools interested in addressing the needs of at-risk students are in a unique position to ensure opportunities for creatively-inclined students to explore their creative potentials within a nourishing and rich learning environment.

#### Concept of Creative Personal Identity and Academic Engagement

In investigating the association between creative personal identity and academic engagement, this study found that those participants with a stronger



sense of creative personal identity tended also to be more academically engaged. The creatively-inclined participants who benefitted most from the protective factor of a robust creative personal identity in association with family support and multiple opportunities for creative expression also tended to register lower frequency scores in the negative self-concept subcategory. They described themselves as being popular at school, having above-average intellectual abilities and being much more accepting of their physical appearances. These positive self-conceptions correlated with a lower risk of academic failure at the end of their Grade Nine year and corroborate earlier research findings that there is a strong correlation between self-concept and academic achievement (Damrongpanit, 2009; Marsh, 2003; Marsh, Trautwein, Ludtke, Koller, & Baumert, 2005; Wengler, 2009).

By contrast, the creatively-inclined participants who had a weaker creative personal identity tended to have a much more negative self-perception overall. They viewed themselves as being unpopular at school and as having below-average intellectual skills and abilities. They were also less accepting of their physical appearances and, in both interviews and journals, more frequently cited instances of teasing and/or online bullying. Moreover, those participants with negative self-concepts were also found to be at higher risk for academic failure at the end of their Grade Nine year. For the purposes of this study, the concept of academic disengagement was drawn in part from recent research that adopted attendance and punctuality as measurements of academic disengagement (Ferguson, Tilliczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Willms, Friesen, & Milton,

2009). Employing student attendance and punctuality as one measure for academic engagement, this study determined that the creatively-inclined participants who were most at risk for academic failure were also those who had higher levels of truancy and absenteeism, and thus were considered more academically disengaged.

The concept of non-conformance as a component of creativity was also based on research literature that indicated that creatively-inclined persons tend to exhibit a higher incidence of non-conformist attitudes and behaviours (Csikszentimihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Feist, 1999; Griffin & McDermott, 1998; Runco, 2007). To measure non-conformance among the creatively-inclined participants in this study, frequency scores for involvement in high-risk behaviours such as smoking, under-age drinking, illegal drugs and un-chaperoned partying were calculated and accepted as indicators. Truancy, suspensions and negative student/teacher interactions cited by the creatively-inclined participants were also tabulated as markers of non-conformance. Of the creatively-inclined participants, those individuals who had the weakest sense of creative personal identity as well as the highest frequency scores for negative self-perception also tended to more likely to engage in non-conformance behaviours at school. They were more likely to be truant and/or suspended, and were more prone to negative interactions with teachers and/or administrators. They were also more heavily involved in high risk behaviours which included under-age drinking, illegal drugs, un-chaperoned partying and multiple sexual partners.

However, in sharing their stories, a number of the creatively-inclined at-risk participants who held negative self-perceptions were quick to blame themselves for their non-conformist attitudes and lack of academic engagement. Rather than pointing to external factors such as lack of support for their creative interests and/or school curriculum that was irrelevant and boring, they instead blamed themselves for their lack of success. As one student put it, “Some of your classes you will sit there and you will be falling asleep, but you kind of understand that you are in high school now and this is what it’s like...it doesn’t matter how boring it is, you have to listen and you have to take notes...it’s up to you.” They clearly accepted responsibility for their disappointing academic outcomes. Research studies have determined that, among teachers and school administrators, as well, the burden of blame for academic failure most often is placed on students’ shoulders (Henriksson, 2008; Field & Olafson, 1999). The creatively-inclined participants at high risk for academic failure attributed their lack of school success to their own self-perceived negative qualities and character traits and, in so doing, apparently internalized the blame for failure. In making students culpable for their own lack of success, educational institutions and students themselves miss important opportunities to constructively amend the role that institutional factors have played in those negative outcomes (Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Henriksson, 2008; Field & Olafson, 1999).

### Concept of Negative Self-Perception and Intellectual Disengagement

Intellectual disengagement also correlated strongly with negative self-perceptions among the creatively-inclined students who were at high risk for academic failure. The concept of intellectual disengagement employed here was based on Willms, Friesen, and Milton's (2009) understanding of intellectual engagement as encompassing a student's general sense of curricular enjoyment, interest and relevance. Again, the creatively-inclined participants who were identified as having a strong sense of personal creative identity as well as a positive self-perception tended to see school as being more intellectually engaging. By contrast, those creatively-inclined participants who lacked a strong creative identity and had a negative self-conception tended to have the highest frequency scores for intellectual disengagement. For them, school was a boring place and coursework was seen as more burdensome than intellectually engaging.

It is worth noting that the Grade Nine year began positively for all participants in this study, and each one described how excited she was after her first day of Grade Nine. However, the creatively-inclined participants who lacked a strong personal creative identity indicated that school seemed to lose its excitement by the end of the first semester and, during the second semester of Grade Nine, they had become bored and unengaged by their schooling. A dramatic drop in grade point average and/or deterioration in the tone of teacher comments on report cards corroborated this intellectual disengagement. The decline in intellectual engagement among participants was in keeping with

widespread research findings that, for majority of at-risk students, intellectual engagement decreases steadily and significantly from Grade Six through to Grade Twelve (Archer, Halsall, Hollingworth, & Mendick, 2005; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Spielhoffer, Benton, Evens, Featherstone, Golden, Nelson, & Smith, 2009; Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). In this study, however, the intellectual disengagement was more pronounced in the creatively-inclined students who harboured both lower estimates of their personal creative potential and more negative self-perceptions. According to Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, and Rummens (2005), early school leavers often cite boredom and lack of curriculum relevance as school-related factors that have led to early school leaving. In this study as well, when participants were asked if there were any courses or assignments that seemed to address their creative interests, the creatively-inclined participants who were at high risk for academic failure struggled to find examples of these. In fact, most examples provided were drawn from optional credits such as Dance, Visual Arts, Instrumental Music and Drama. The single exception came from an Academic-level English course where an opportunity was given to write a short story. Thus, it would seem that those creatively-inclined students who lacked opportunity to be involved in creative activities outside of school hours had very little opportunity at school to make up this deficit by participating in learning activities relevant to their creative interests. These same students were found to be at greatest risk for intellectual disengagement and academic failure. Such findings underscore a principle made clear in a number of research studies: that all Secondary-level students require

schoolwork that is intellectually engaging and curriculum that is emotionally relevant (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Davis, Luce-Kapler, & Sumara, 2000; Donaleen, 2005; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Gould Lundy, 2006; Jardine, Clifford, & Friesen, 2008; Probst, 2004; Rosenblatt, 2004; Schlechty, 2002). For creatively-inclined students, this means school work that captures their creative interests.

In terms of motivation, research findings have indicated that the best predictor of academic success and workplace productivity is intellectual engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Dweck, 2007; Pink, 2009; Sauerman & Cohen, 2008). Students who are intellectually engaged are much more likely to put in the effort required to master a skill or to complete a difficult project. According to Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen (1997), intellectual engagement in the classroom requires the confluence of four factors: “feelings of choice, clarity, a lack of self-consciousness, and a merger between action and awareness” (p. 192). An educator who is adamant about providing creatively-inclined students with opportunities for intellectual engagement is someone who therefore allows her students to tailor their learning environment to their own interests and styles of learning. Creatively-inclined students in a classroom that promotes intellectual engagement are also presented with “increasingly complex tasks that keep pace with their interests and extend the reach of their current skills” (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997, p. 193). To create an emotionally safe environment where creatively-inclined students can explore who they are and in which they can afford to take academic

and creative risks is another important factor that promotes intellectual engagement. In an emotionally safe environment, the teacher is aware of the complex learning needs of her students. However, intellectual engagement is not something that the creatively-inclined at-risk students in this study were apparently fortunate enough to experience with any consistency in their Grade Nine classrooms.

### Concept of Social Engagement

As part of their inquiry into the determinants of student engagement among 32,322 participants, Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) included an examination of levels of social engagement at school. Social engagement was measured in two domains: students' sense of belonging and students' participation levels in sports and school clubs. One important factor that contributed to a sense of social engagement for approximately 67% of their participants was regular participation in extracurricular activities. Moreover, for all students, the development of positive relationships with peers led to a stronger sense of belonging in the school environment. According to Willms, Friesen, and Milton, students who did not feel a sense of belonging at school were more likely to be disengaged socially and at risk for early school leaving. The concept of social disengagement was similarly addressed in this present study by looking for indicators of social disengagement among its creatively-inclined participants. These included reports of negative interactions with peers and feelings of social isolation as a result of teasing and bullying. Again, the creatively-inclined students who cited the fewest indicators of social isolation and/or negative

interactions with their peers were those students who held the strongest creative personal identities, experienced the lowest levels of academic and intellectual disengagement and were at low risk for academic failure. By contrast, those creatively-inclined students who were more likely to cite evidence of social isolation and/or negative interactions with their peers were those who held negative self-conceptions, had weaker creative personal identities, experienced higher levels of academic and intellectual disengagement and were at higher risk of academic failure. Thus, the findings relevant to social disengagement among the creatively-inclined participants in this study seemed to mirror Willms, Friesen, and Milton's (2009) research findings that students who do not feel socially and intellectually engaged at school may also be at higher risk for academic disengagement, which in turn may lead to early school leaving.

#### Concept of Social Engagement and Transition Strategies Employed

The degree of social engagement among the creatively-inclined participants in this study seemed to strongly influence their choice of strategies for transitioning into Grade Nine. Research on early school leaving indicates that, even though students themselves most frequently cite psychosocial issues as reasons for their disengagement and early leaving, most studies that examine the transition process for early school leavers have focused on academic correlates rather than on psychological correlates (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005, Turner, 2007). In this study as well, when asked to share any techniques they had employed to help them prepare for Grade Nine, those creatively-inclined participants who were



found to be most at-risk for academic failure at the end of their Grade Nine year exclusively described psychosocial strategies. These involved extensive time and effort devoted to devising and implementing dramatic changes in physical appearance, attitudinal transformations and/or targeting of a new social group. In sharp contrast, the creatively-inclined participants in this study who were at low risk for academic failure at the end of Grade Nine had not devoted any time at all to psychosocial strategies. At interview, they indicated that they had been content with who they were and had seen no reason for physical or attitudinal self-transformation. When asked if they had found new friends, these participants indicated that, although it had seemed important initially for them to retain their Elementary school friends, as the school year had progressed, they had also seen value in finding new friends who shared their creative interests. The approach resulted in a combination of loyal friends who had withstood the test of time and a few new friends whom they were excited to get know more fully.

Successful transition strategies employed by the creatively-inclined students who were at low risk for academic failure typically focused on strategies for academic success. These participants tended to attach more importance to keeping up with their school work, usually viewing homework as an opportunity to review notes or to practice new skills. They were also more proactive in ensuring that the workload was evenly balanced across semesters, even going so far as to have their schedules changed so that their more difficult courses did not fall in the same semester. In terms of optional credits, the creatively-inclined and successful students also shared that a key strategy for them was to select

courses appealing to their own creative interests rather than based on what their friends were taking. Because these creatively-inclined participants tended to have a stronger sense of personal creativity identity, they were able to implement what research has confirmed to be a successful strategy for creatively-inclined students – namely to select course options that will meet their needs for intellectual engagement (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Dweck, 2007; Pink, 2009). Another successful transition employed by the creatively-inclined students who were at low risk for academic failure was to become involved in extracurricular activities and, in doing so, they ensured their social engagement in school as well (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009).

When asked what advice they would give to prospective Grade Nine students, the two groups of creatively-inclined participants again offered contrasting responses. Those who were at low risk for academic failure maintained that they would advise Grade Eight students of the importance of doing homework, maintaining good grades and paying attention in class. They also suggested that Grade Eight students should be encouraged to get involved in extracurricular activities so that they could meet people who shared their interests. By contrast, those creatively-inclined students who were at higher risk for academic failure suggested transition strategies that would help Grade Eight students to adjust socially. As one participant put it: “I would to tell them [the Grade Eight students] not to worry about who their friends are in Grade Eight and not to worry about what anyone thinks of you and I would tell them to find your true friends in Grade Nine instead.” Although the creatively-inclined at-risk

students in this study placed first priority on the psychosocial dimensions of the transition process from Elementary school to Grade Nine, during their orientation sessions schools, tended to focus almost entirely on academic performance. According to research on school engagement and transitions, such a focus on academic performance rather than on the psychological correlates of the transition process is fairly typical in Secondary school orientation sessions (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Meluish, Sammons, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Turner, 2007).

### **Implications of the Study: Toward an Integrated Model for Transitioning Creative Students at Risk**

A primary purpose of this study was to identify the strategies by which creatively-inclined students had undertaken to negotiate their transition into high school. Examination of strategies creatively-inclined at-risk students employed as part of their transition process allowed me to probe and uncover system-based factors that may have contributed to their disengagement and their increased risk for early school leaving. This also helped me to understand what kind of institutional support would be required to make the transition into high school more successful for creatively-inclined students who are at higher risk for academic disengagement. An analysis of data derived from interviews, journal responses and report cards representing a theoretical sample of seven creatively-inclined students in three Ontario Secondary schools uncovered five key areas in which creatively-inclined students require support. Institutional

changes in these five areas are now suggested as part of a model for supporting the transition of creatively-inclined students into Grade Nine.

First and foremost, creatively-inclined students require schools that offer extracurricular activities and optional courses designed to enable students to explore their creative interests and to develop their creative skills. Secondly, creatively-inclined students need school administrators who are flexible in accommodating individual student scheduling needs and innovative in terms of student success initiatives. Third, availability of curriculum that is intellectually stimulating and emotionally relevant is another institutional factor that would help creatively-inclined students to succeed in high school. Fourth, creatively-inclined students need teachers who deeply understand the value adolescents place on autonomy and the freedom to choose. Finally, creatively-inclined students need school programs that focus specifically on facilitating the psychosocial aspects of the transition process.

#### Increased Opportunities for Creative Activities and Skill Development

Those creatively-inclined participants in this study who were at low risk for academic failure had the distinct advantage of participating in creative activities, outside of the school setting and beginning in childhood. As current research would also suggest, their regular participation in creative activities from an early age developed in them a strong creative personal identity (Jaussi, Randel, & Dionne, 2007). By contrast, the creatively-inclined students in this study who were at higher risk for academic failure entered Grade Nine with a weaker sense of creative personal identity. They had families that would not and/or could not

nurture their creative personal identities through regular participation in creative learning opportunities outside of the school setting. As confirmed by other research findings, students who have not had the advantage of developing their creative interests and skills early in life are at higher risk for academic failure in Grade Nine (Damrongpanit, 2009; Marsh, 2003; Marsh, Trautwein, Ludtke, Koller, & Baumert, 2005; Wengler, 2009).

In addressing this lack of opportunity for at-risk students to participate in activities related to their creative interests, schools could play an important role in providing extracurricular activities that focus specifically on creative skill development. Photography clubs, visual arts projects, musical jam sessions, poetry readings, improvisational drama clubs and creative writing groups are a few examples of the types of extracurricular activities likely to meet the needs of creatively-inclined students. Although these are not novel ideas and many schools already offer such opportunities, these tend to be offered over the lunch hour rather than as after-school activities. A number of at-risk participants in this study indicated that, because they placed such a high premium on their social interactions over the lunch hour, they had not been willing to participate in school clubs that would interfere with this crucial social time. In fact, when asked about extracurricular activities, many of the at-risk participants shared that they had actually been enrolled in such extra-curricular activities at semester start, but dropped out after the first meeting when it became evident that these activities were going to be held over the lunch hour and would cost them valuable time with friends. Canadian research on Secondary school engagement suggests that

social engagement as a result of participation in school clubs and extracurricular activities may serve as a protective factor against academic disengagement and early school leaving (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). Therefore, to make these groups available during a time slot that is more typically reserved for school sporting activities would have the added benefit of providing at-risk students with an opportunity to meet new people who share similar creative interests and to develop friendship relationships with like-minded individuals in a new peer group. Regular participation in these creative learning opportunities would also allow at-risk students to develop their personal creative identities through exploration and skill development which, in turn, would also serve as a protective factor against intellectual disengagement (Dweck, 2007; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1997).

Another strategy that high school administrators might employ to support creatively-inclined students in the development of their creative personal identities, would be to offer a greater variety of optional credits to students entering Grade Nine. In the Ontario high schools in this study, optional Grade Nine credits were limited to: Drama; Dance; Instrumental and Vocal Music; Visual Arts; Introduction to Information Technology in Business; Individual and Family Living; and Hospitality and Tourism Technology. A number of other creative arts course options, however, have recently been authorized by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Through its *Reach Every Student* initiative, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) has added to its Grade Nine and Ten arts curriculum a number of new arts courses, including: Photography, Creative Writing, Interior and

Fashion Design, Film/Video, and Crafts. The rationale behind creating these new optional courses was to “enable students to better customize their high school education and improve their prospects for success in school” (p.3). Making these courses available in Grade Nine serves the purpose of offering scope for creative skill development – something that the creatively-inclined at-risk students in this study identified as being a helpful transition strategy for them. In interview, a number of these creatively-inclined at-risk students lamented the fact that they “had to wait until Grade Eleven” before they could enrol in what they saw as the more interesting courses. For the at-risk students in this study, availability of creatively-oriented optional courses in Grade Nine could have served the crucial purpose of developing their personal creative identities as musicians or artists. According to research, having a chance to develop a more positive self-concept is strongly correlated to academic achievement (Damrongpanit, 2009; Marsh, 2003).

#### Institutional Flexibility in Setting Individual Timetables

Findings in this study also suggest that, as part of their early-school-leaving mitigation strategy, educational institutions need to become more flexible in scheduling so that creatively-inclined at-risk students are provided with creatively-oriented learning opportunities throughout the school year. In assessing intellectual engagement, Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1997) suggest that, in order for a student to be entirely engaged in a learning activity, a fairly precise match is necessary between a student’s actual skill level and the level of challenge inherent in the task. If the individual’s skill level is high

but the challenge level is low, that student is likely to become bored and lose interest in the activity. On the other hand, where the challenge inherent in the task is high while the individual's skill level is low, frustration and anxiety can be expected to result. Thus, to maximize intellectual engagement in course work by creatively-inclined students, it is crucial to accurately gauge student ability and then to appropriately place the individual in Academic-, Applied- or Essential-level courses. This matching strategy falls partly within the domain of Guidance counsellors who review the option sheets of incoming Grade Nine students. In order to match individual skill levels to courses in the most suitable academic stream, Guidance counsellors must take the time both to carefully explain course level expectations to prospective Grade Nine students and to review their Grade Nine course choices in light of their Grade Eight report cards. These strategies would help ensure that incoming Grade Nine students have been as appropriately placed as possible, with students' creative interests and skill levels accurately matched to the course expectations and degree of course difficulty.

Guidance counsellors and school administrators must also be flexible and motivated enough to find ways to make schedule changes as required, even when the goal of a balanced individual timetable is difficult to achieve. Six of the seven creatively-inclined students in this study reported having been given class schedules in which the workload was clearly unequally balanced from one semester to the next. Those students who were able to convince school administrators to rearrange their schedules so as to achieve a more balanced workload fared much better academically in the end than did those students who



were not thus accommodated. Those participants in the present study who failed courses attributed this in part to unevenly-weighted schedules that timetabled their easiest courses during the first semester. This had lulled them into thinking that “high school was easier than Elementary school”, and did not prepare them for the much heavier work load in the second semester. Research on transitions supports the idea that there is often a mismatch between students’ expectations of work in secondary school and their actual experience (Galton, Gray, & Ruddock, 2000; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2004). By the time these students’ failing grades materialize, it is too late in the semester to make changes that would avoid missed credits. Perhaps a timetabling system better adapted to making schedule changes before the school year is fully under way, would have helped these students to better cope with their Grade Nine courses.

Guidance counsellors play another crucial role at midterm report time, at which point it becomes evident from progress reports that certain students are falling behind academically. Credit recovery and credit rescue are two Ontario Ministry of Education initiatives designed to support students who are at risk for academic failure. As part of the Ministry’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy (2005), credit rescue programs have become effective alternatives for student success. The credit rescue initiative entails placement of a student who is failing a course with a Student Success teacher whose job it is to provide the one-on-one support needed to help the individual rescue the credit that is likely to be lost if nothing changes. However, of the three students in this study who were failing a Grade Nine course, only one was offered the option to rescue that credit.

The other two participants were pulled from the courses they were failing and re-situated in courses that were less demanding academically. However, because in these cases the issue for both students was actually a lack of intellectual challenge, transplanting them into an even less challenging course simply exacerbated their boredom. Research findings affirm that, when skill level is high and challenge is low, boredom and lack of intellectual engagement is often the result (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997). According to McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow (2004), it is also not unusual for Secondary school teachers to misinterpret a dip in academic performance in Grade Nine as a lack of skill and to underestimate student capabilities. Such a mistake, however, can be costly in terms of student engagement when students are held back and placed in courses clearly lacking needed challenge. This certainly seems to have been the case for the students in this study who were placed in courses they felt were too easy – which then led directly to intellectual disengagement, boredom, missed classes and ultimately academic failure.

#### Emotional Engagement and the Student/Teacher Relationship

Intellectual disengagement and boredom can also occur when curriculum is not perceived as relevant and/or emotionally engaging. Research to date underscores the principle that students want Secondary school work that they find emotionally relevant (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Davis, Luce-Kapler, & Sumara, 2000; Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2008; Probst, 2004; Rosenblatt, 2004; Schlechty, 2002). Creatively-inclined participants in this study who were at high risk for academic failure also made it clear, in both their

interviews and their journals, that they became bored in courses that covered material that was not relevant to their personal lives. When asked to provide examples of times when they had felt truly interested in class, all student accounts included instances when teachers revealed something personal about their lives. For example, one participant's anecdote was when her English teacher "had this story where she died for a couple of seconds and she got boosted back to life". Another participant provided the following example:

My Geography teacher...he was more than just a Geography teacher...he had like travel experience, so he had all these interesting stories to tell that like...makes me want to go and like travel and see all the different places that I can and my Science teacher similarly...she knew a lot of fun facts and stories and it just changed the way like I viewed certain parts of it...space...I want to like maybe do some astronomy or something.

Such vignettes provided clear evidence that the creatively-inclined students in this study were not looking for dramatic changes in the way curriculum was presented. They were engaged by simple tales their teachers told. The material seemed to come alive for them whenever they could see the teacher as a human being sharing personal stories or engaging anecdotes. Freire (2003) would explain these interactions as rare examples of times when "the teacher/student contradiction" was briefly resolved (p. 79). The educator in these examples had stepped outside of the teacher's traditional role as someone who "expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students" and had instead invited the listener into a more personal and emotionally genuine space (Freire, p.72). Such rare moments of reconciliation

are what the students in this study were hungry for. In their study of creative adolescents, Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen (1997) also reported other examples of creative students who cited examples of memorable moments when teachers invited them into an emotionally intimate space in the classroom setting. A renewed focus on the importance of the teacher/student relationship in today's Secondary schools would go a long way in the provision of emotionally engaging teaching environments in which creatively-inclined students are more likely to thrive.

#### The Need for Autonomy and the Transition Process

In examining the transition process from Elementary to Secondary school, a number of research studies have used stage-environmental fit theories to understand the stresses adolescents experience at this time (Eccles, Midgely, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993). According to such a framework, when changes in the schooling environment do not match an adolescent's developmental needs and capabilities, negative psychological outcomes will result. Ferguson, Tilliczek, Boydell, and Rummens (2005) invoke a stage-environmental fit perspective in noting that classroom contexts which are controlling and limit student choice can lead to early school leaving for youth who have a natural developmental inclination toward autonomy. In the present study as well, the combination of a need for autonomy with a perceived lack of choice was identified as an issue among the creatively-inclined students who were at high risk for academic failure. It is also relevant to note here that research into character traits of creative people concurs that such persons tend to be non-

conformists (Csikszentimihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1997; Feist, 1999; Griffin & McDermott, 1998; Runco, 2007). Given that the at-risk participants in this study were likely to have had a greater natural inclination toward non-conformity by virtue of their creative dispositions as well as a natural developmental inclination toward autonomy by virtue of their age, their non-conformance behaviours at school and their strong drive to make their own choices are understandable.

All creatively-inclined at-risk students in this study also made multiple references to the freedom they had experienced during those first weeks in Grade Nine. They unanimously characterized Elementary school as a place where there was no real freedom and “you were under the teacher’s eye all the time”. When they came into Grade Nine, they were surprised to find that they could leave the school premises during lunch hour and that there was no one monitoring “your every move”. However, every example of freedom they provided had to do with activities outside of the classroom setting. By contrast, when asked to provide examples of choice and autonomy in the classroom, they tended to remember Elementary school as a time when they had enjoyed greater self-direction in terms of school assignments. Secondary school, on the other hand, was regarded by the at-risk students in this study as being very teacher-centred and offering little input when it came to choice of assignments. As one student put it in her interview, “Teachers are really pushy about your final project, the ISU. They are very pushy. They want it a certain way and like if you miss something, they pounce on you.” Thus, a transition strategy that might provide needed autonomy for creatively-inclined at-risk students would be to extend

some of the freedom of choice enjoyed outside the Grade Nine classroom to activities and assignments encountered inside the classroom, offering students more options when it comes to assignments or independent study units. According to Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1997), “a measure of choice is arguably the ingredient most crucial to the realization of intrinsic rewards” for the creatively-inclined student in the classroom setting (p.193). Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens (2005) also observed that the early school leavers in their study generally exhibited a greater need for autonomy, and were much less socially conforming than were their more successful peers. Pink (2009) also made the pointed observation that autonomy is an innate psychological need for all people, and that this need is particularly pronounced in individuals whose life work is deemed more creative. Thus, schools that offer more options in course selection and classroom teachers who give added choices in terms of assignments are more likely to meet the transition needs of creatively-inclined students who are at higher risk for academic failure.

A related strategy that might make the transition process more successful for at-risk students, and one that is supported in the research literature, is to already provide more freedom outside the classroom in Grade Eight. In their research on successful transition strategies in the United Kingdom, Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Meluish, Sammons, & Siraj-Blatchford (2010) observed that Elementary schools which provided their senior students with more autonomy and more responsibility around the school generally seemed to help bridge the gap between “the restricted, controlled primary context” and the less restrictive

Secondary school setting (p. 95). Greater liberty during Grade Eight was also seen by participants in this study as a measure that would have helped to prepare them for the unprecedented absence of teacher supervision encountered in Grade Nine. One participant made reference to the fact that the sudden freedom she experienced in Grade Nine had led to poor choices on her part – leading to truancy and school suspensions. Because no one seemed to care whether or not she was in class, she felt inclined to take advantage of that lack of restriction. Thus, greater latitude for unsupervised activities during Grade Eight might well help ready students like her for the relative abundance of unsupervised time experienced during Grade Nine.

#### Transition Programming that Focuses on Psychosocial Dimensions

Not unlike early school leavers in other studies, the at-risk students in this study concentrated their energies primarily on managing personal psychosocial issues during their transition into Grade Nine. However, research studies, in examining this process have tended to ignore psychosocial correlates and to focus instead on academic outcomes (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005, Turner, 2007). Thus, a critical aspect of the data analysis in this present study was to gain an understanding of the psychosocial dimensions of the transition process as experienced by the creatively-inclined study participants. As part of their transition plan, the creatively-inclined participants who were at high risk for academic failure undertook very deliberate psychosocial preparations which included changes in physical appearance, attitude and/or choice of peer group. In essence, the at-risk

students in this study were left to devise their own strategies to address the challenges that were uppermost in their minds: fitting in, finding friends, avoiding being teased and preventing being bullied. Two key aspects of a successful transition to high school as identified by Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Meluish, Sammons, & Siraj-Blatchford (2010), are the ability to find new friends and the opportunity to build up self-esteem in the new school setting. Thus, there is an identified need to help children develop their social and personal skills as well as their confidence during those early days and months (Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Meluish, Sammons, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

When participants in this study were asked to describe their Grade Nine school orientation sessions, it became evident that these had been specifically designed by school administrators to reduce student anxiety over finding their way in a large school building and around what was expected academically in high school. As one participant described it:

Um, they pretty much gave us the course review and they told us what it was going to be like in high school and what you were going to be studying and how long your classes were and your schedules and stuff like.

At all three high schools, the focus of the orientation sessions was on helping students with locating their classrooms and lockers; following their schedules, becoming familiar with school rules, and understanding academic expectations. By contrast, these Grade Nine students were given no advice on how to manage psychosocial issues such as bullying, teasing, building friendships and fitting in. Given the research findings and the pressure students experience in terms of the psychosocial aspects of the transition process, a more



sensible transition strategy might be to provide students with practical orientation sessions covering the value of maintaining old friendships, the practical skills involved in finding new friends, strategies to deal with teasing and bullying, and ways to authentically develop self-esteem and self-acceptance. These could be provided as a series of interactive workshops prior to the first day of classes.

Another strategy by which schools could support a successful transition into high school would be to offer Grade Nine students an alternative to the compulsory Healthy Active Living Education course. Ontario's Ministry of Education and Training has made a number of uniquely-designed courses available, such as the Individual and Small Group Activities course. These feature very open-ended curriculum expectations that would allow educators to incorporate any number of salient psychosocial issues relevant to creatively-inclined students at risk for academic failure. It is meaningful to note as well that, during interview sessions held as part of this study, three of the five at-risk participants – who considered themselves athletically disinclined – expressed regret over having had to take the Healthy Active Living Education course which, in practice, was almost entirely comprised of individual physical fitness routines and/or team sports. The Individual and Small Group Activities course could provide a sensible alternative health education credit for these students. Given its open-endedness in terms of curriculum expectations, it could be structured to entail any number of creative activities designed specifically to underscore and support what students were learning psychosocially.

In summary, educational institutions have a key role to play in ensuring a more successful transition into Grade Nine for creatively-inclined at-risk students. Extracurricular activities tailored to allow them to explore their creative interests during the after-school hours would serve the double purpose of helping at-risk students to develop their creative personal identities through skill development while also finding a peer group that already shares their creative interests. More choice in selecting optional courses would provide additional avenues for students to explore their creative interests and develop their skills, while also increasing their engagement levels. Flexible scheduling coupled with the wider implementation of student success initiatives such as credit recovery and/or credit rescue would promote academic success and serve to maintain appropriate credit accumulation rates. Availability of curriculum that is intellectually stimulating and emotionally relevant is an institutional factor that would help engage the energies of creatively-inclined students. Greater autonomy in terms of assignment options is another strategy that would support the successful transition of creatively-inclined at-risk students. Finally, school programs that focus specifically on facilitating the psychosocial aspects of the transition process could provide creatively-inclined students with the sense of social support they crave.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The primary strength of the present study lies in the care taken to respect the words and to understand the ideas shared by participants in their journals and interviews. A careful analysis of the data gathered was carried out using

Atlas.ti software. Over 200 codes were initially adopted to cover a wide range of observations. Systematic cross-checks were made between my observations as interviewer and the initial categories. Categories were refined and subcategories were formed to address emerging themes. The categories and subcategories developed to tabulate and organize data from the first interview and journals remained appropriate when data from the second interview were compiled, suggesting that theoretical saturation had, in fact, occurred. Although the sample consisted of only twelve participants, a relatively high degree of consistency was evident among comments that emerged from the interview transcripts. Also, given the depth of analysis, the number and diversity of the categories, and the volume of memoranda that were needed in the analysis phase of the research study, to include more than twelve respondents would have been overwhelming. To establish validity, relevant data regarding the twelve participants was also derived from multiple sources including in-depth interviews, student journals, the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking results and provincial report cards. Over all, the sample size was sufficient to be meaningful, but small enough to treat input from every participant with the care and respect it deserved.

Another strength of this study is that it was designed to address a gap in the research literature regarding the typical psychosocial profiles of students at risk for academic failure and early school leaving. Most Canadian research to date has focused on fixed situational risk factors such as socio-economic status (Audas & Willms, 2001; Jenson, 2001; Ferguson, Tilleczeck, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Frempong & Willms, 2002; Levin, 2004); parental involvement

(Levin, 2004; Volpe, 2000; Willms, 2003); and special needs (Levin, 2004; Schonert-Reichl, 2000; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000). This investigation was designed to uncover potentially remediable risk factors associated specifically with creatively-inclined students in their entry year of high school e.g. creative personal identity; academic, intellectual and social engagement. A further gap in the literature that this study has addressed regards the role that psychosocial factors play in the transition into Grade Nine. Although early school leavers most frequently cite psychosocial issues as reasons for their disengagement and early leaving, most studies which examine the transition into Secondary school have focused on academic performance rather than on psychological correlates (Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Meluish, Sammons, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Turner, 2007).

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1999) discussion concerning the feasibility of translating a theoretical model into an operational form in order to assess its scientific validity, a number of limitations in this study are brought to light. For example, although families of the participants understandably have had a significant role to play in their daughters' transition processes and that role is not to be underestimated, the data concerning family influences on creativity were drawn entirely from what the participants volunteered about their family members and family relationships. It was not the intention of this study to corroborate what students said by checking with family members. Moreover, although the influence of families on participants' engagement in creative activities was acknowledged

in the research findings, there was no way to measure its impact on the participants' creative personal identity. Ontario's standardized Secondary school curriculum was another contextual factor alluded to in this study and, although it may have played an important role in terms of students' levels of engagement and/or disengagement, its characteristics were not fully addressed in the research findings. Because the research question was focused primarily on participants' perceptions of the Grade Nine experience, the study was limited to the participants' points of views. Grade point averages, attendance records, teacher comments and students' performance on the TTCT were the only arguably objective components of the research study. The purpose of the theoretical framework presented was to unite concepts and to explain how they connected and interrelated. In accordance with the research question that gave shape to this study, its purpose was a narrative inquiry designed to help identify and understand the educational implications of the issues creatively-inclined at-risk students might face in transitioning from Elementary to Secondary school. The final result was not meant to comprise a cohesive theory; rather, it calls for an imaginative understanding of the phenomenon – one that assumes “multiple realities” and “indeterminacy” (Charmaz, 2006, p.126)

The theoretical sample size of twelve participants was small and thus, limited the generalizability of the research findings as well. In terms of selecting participants, the study was designed to rely on volunteers to complete the survey, to self-identify as being creative and to acknowledge their willingness to participate. The participants who met these criteria were all females, and

generalizability was limited in that way as a result. It is worthwhile to note, nonetheless, that in their study of over 200 talented teenagers, Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1997), found that there was no appreciable difference between the males and females in terms of their commitment to talent and in their likeliness to become “disengaged from the domain of their talent by the end of high school” (p. 207). Nevertheless the all-female sample does indeed limit the research study in that it reflects only the perceptions of creatively-inclined female students in Grade Nine.

### **Future Research Agendas**

The present study provides a variety of inviting possibilities for subsequent research. Because only females were included here, a critical next step would be to replicate the study with a comparable sample of creatively-inclined male students. This research would aim to elicit any relevant differences apparently attributable to gender.

Since this study focused only on the first year of high school, a longitudinal study tracking individuals through their high school careers might provide necessary insight to confirm how creatively-inclined at-risk students are disadvantaged in a standardized curriculum setting and how they alter the strategies they employ to counterbalance those disadvantages.

With regard to school effectiveness, a research project could be created to examine scheduling flexibility, student success programming, orientation sessions, optional credits offered, access to creative activities and availability of extracurricular clubs for creatively-inclined at-risk students. Schools

characterized by lower incidences of early school leaving could be the focus of this study, and a list of best practices could be derived from such an examination.

If change is to be effected at the institutional level, it is crucial that research findings be reported in a format that is accessible to the practitioners and administrators who are in a position to implement new strategies and/or programs based on those results. As the primary investigator, I could improve the accessibility of the findings in the present study by converting much more of the raw data into data poems, each of these centering on one of the subcategories addressed in the coding and data analysis process. Another approach for improving accessibility could involve using this study's data findings to design an orientation workshop that focuses primarily on psychosocial issues and Grade Nine transition strategies. This orientation workshop could be promoted among school board administrators across a section of schools selected to pilot the program. Employing focus groups consisting of students who have participated in these workshops, data could be gathered and analyzed as a way to rate the effectiveness of the workshop in addressing the psychosocial needs of students at risk for academic disengagement and early school leaving. These findings could be drawn upon to train educational practitioners in readiness to offer such workshops more widely the following year. Another pilot project could be to offer the Individual and Small Group Activities course in a single high school as an alternative to the Health Active Living Education course. Focus groups as well as participants' overall academic performances could serve as measures to determine the relative effectiveness of such a Physical Education course for

creatively-inclined/athletically disinclined students who are at high risk for academic failure in Grade Nine.



## 6. CONCLUSION

### **Intricate Countries Revealed - In Their Own Words**

It's always the chance word, unthinking  
gesture that unlocks the face before you.  
Reveals intricate countries  
deep within the eyes. The hidden  
lives, like sudden miracles,  
that breathe there.

Wallace (1988)

In her poem, "Common Magic", Wallace (1988) explored the concept that, as human beings, each of us creates for ourselves interior landscapes, intricately designed and rich in detail. It is from within these protected and private consciousnesses that we come to experience and understand the world around us. Functionally, however, we live in shared spaces alongside others – purpose-driven environments dominated by responsibilities and externally-imposed deadlines. Yet, despite our proximity, these day-to-day pressures render us emotionally preoccupied and masked from each other. It is only through chance words or unknowing gestures, suggests Wallace (1988), that we catch glimpses of the hidden inner lives and, indeed, the intricate countries within others. This is a compelling metaphor and one that succinctly captures my own sense of the world.

In both interview sessions and journal responses, I was afforded the opportunity, time and time again, to note such chance phrases and to observe those unthinking gestures that seemed to unlock the faces before me. Revealed for brief moments at a time were the intricately landscaped countries within. Thus, directly and indirectly, participants effectively painted for me rich portraits of their inward and outward lives. The combined portraits of those lived

experiences are what I have undertaken to present here. The selected images and words encapsulate the participants' lived experiences as I have documented them, from the vantage point of my own interior landscape. Student data concerning disengagement in the classroom was used to create the following data poem on their conceptualizations of disengagement (*Figure 6.i*)

### Conceptualizations of Intellectual and Academic Disengagement (*Figure 6.i*)

**Proclamations of Boredom: Rage Spread Thin**

The answer is: a) School is **BORING**.

School is SOOOOOOOO boring, I had to use more than one colour ;O)

I don't know how many muscles there are in my body.  
And I don't care about the solar system.  
I can't really relate to any facts that aren't happening in my life right now.  
I hate most of my classes and I'm tired of writing news articles.  
There's never anything new like... "Oh that is interesting!"

Trying to pay attention in class is seriously boring ☹️  
The teacher - she rambles on and on and on and on and on...

You have that voice in your head and you feel desperate to get up and leave.  
"I crush your head," I say as I squeeze her tiny face between my fingers.

When you are bored like this you want to kill yourself...you are that bored!

There are a bunch of bugs in our Math class and the boys sometimes  
Block the hole – with a Nutrigrain bar.  
My teacher yells at them for being too loud.

I find that funny.

When I'm really bored, I feel like angry and obnoxious.  
And just start doing obnoxious things like poke someone.  
I find ways to amuse myself by twiddling my thumbs or flicking a piece of paper...  
Or I'll make a big scene.  
I'll sit in a corner or I'll run around  
Singing, "Mission Impossible" – my hands a gun  
My back against the wall  
You will get sent into the hall – the teacher will come and talk to you.  
You will be amused and the class will be too.

I don't know how to explain it.  
It's like you're wasting your life just sitting here doing nothing  
There's nothing to gain...like there's no purpose.  
It wasn't boring at first  
Now nothing really goes on...and I will be falling asleep.  
But I am kind of learning to understand  
I am in high school now; it doesn't matter how boring it is.

My advice is this: High school is really boring. But you only have three years left!

**FB Update:** I'm writing crappy poetry in my Math class because I'm bored.

**PLS text my cell!**

Student data concerning social disengagement in the classroom was also used to create the following data poem on their conceptualizations of social engagement and/or disengagement (*Figure 6.ii*)

### Conceptualizations of Social Engagement/Disengagement (*Figure 6.ii*)

Off the Wall: Epithets of Mutability	
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Today was good until it started to go bad. I need time to breathe. Saline turns to saltwater as it runs into my screaming lips. <b><u>Comment:</u></b> Are you okay?
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	It's half past three and I'm finally coming up for air.  <b>3 people</b> like this.
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Skipped Math and walked into town. Best day ever! <b><u>Comment:</u></b> BFF has tagged you in a photo. 
	<b><u>Comment:</u></b> I look like crap and no, we weren't doing weed.
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Got busted for skipping and now I'm grounded for a week.  <b>1 person</b> doesn't like this. <b><u>Comment:</u></b> Does that mean no Zone on Friday?
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Pity is wasted here so don't bother. It's empty as your lullaby voice and sweet words.
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Looking at someone makes them freak out and call you names? I don't get it. <b><u>Comment:</u></b> Niners don't know shit
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	I am <b>UBER</b> lonely, sad, depressed, misunderstood. I need angel wings.  <b>8 people</b> dislike this. <b><u>Comment:</u></b> Where are you? <b><u>Comment:</u></b> Locked myself in the washroom to <b>avoid</b> cleaning <b>DRAMA</b> i.e. Yelling + Screaming = Stress
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	I hate high school. So much drama – guys aren't worth it.
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Hanging out @ G20. None of us has smokes so we're dying! <b><u>Comment:</u></b> No money for smokes? That sucks!
<b><u>Update:</u></b>	Let's party till we pass out. Drink till we're dead.  <b>12 people</b> like this. <b><u>Comment:</u></b> LOL...yes!

Update: Dance rehearsal and then getting my tongue pierced. 🎵  
👍 6 people like this.

Update: I just got home from my dance recital and I sucked. I messed up so much. I'm quitting dance.  
👎 3 people dislike this.

Comment: Serious?

Update: Moving while dealing with exams sucks majorly. This is how my week went...Monday, my science exam (which I failed because I only got to study the night before). After I came home on Monday, I started packing boxes for my entire room and the bathroom and I didn't get done until 10:30. Then I had to study for my Math exam. When I wrote the exam, I didn't get to answer maybe 1/4 of the test and I just made up the rest. I hate my life.

Update: Mom is pissed. I'm becoming distant until she gets her shit figured out. ;O)

Update: Going camping all weekend. Can hardly wait!  
👍 1 person likes this.

Comment: Call me when you get back. We'll hang out.

Update: Did you know you're beautiful, amazing? So why are you here with me? Your lips on mine are more sincere than any words I could string together.  
👍 1 person likes this.

Update: Hold on to whatever keeps you from hating me, you're gonna need it. Breathing in your mumbled nightmares and sighing out confessed praises.

Update: I can't be your sunshine. I can't brighten up your day. I can't make you feel all better or make the rain clouds go away.

Comment: Let's compare scars, I'll tell you whose is worse.

Update: I'm sad. I miss like how we used to be. I can't even start a fucking conversation with you anymore. :O(

Update: Welcome one and all to the freakshow I call my life. I am sick of the rumours! Quit spreading lies about me. No, I am **NOT** a whore. I'm **NOT** bisexual and **not** a bulimic!!!!

Update: How do you block someone on FB?

Comment: Just go to your *My Privacy* page. Click "Search" and then hit "Block Person". It's that easy.

👍 4 people like this.



In Leila's journal, she painted a series of self-portraits – done in water colour. These water-colours have been included as indicators of Leila's own self-perceptions and as a tribute to her creative capabilities (Figure 6.iii and 6.iv).

**Self-Perceptions – a Creatively-Inclined At-Risk Student (*Figure 6.iii and 6.iv*)**



***Self-Portrait # 1 (Figure 6.iii)***

***Self-Portrait # 2 (Figure 6.iv)***



Student data concerning the Grade Nine experience in retrospect were also used to create the following data poem created to capture the essence of their resilience (*Figure 6.v*)

**Conceptualizations of Resilience and Transformation (*Figure 6.v*)**

**Through the Forest of Hands and Teeth: The Courage to Be**

You have struggles,  
Lessons making you who you're going to be  
You spend your time with friends who have always known how to make you laugh: The  
Reindeer were hung by the chimney with care  
In hopes that Zac Efron would soon be there.  
You discover new friends too  
Some of them – growing up way too fast  
A few are meant to hurt you,  
And they do.

There are many days when you don't know where you belong and  
You wonder who you really are  
You re-create yourself and then wish you hadn't  
You eventually learn the truth – everyone may hurt you  
And you must find the ones worth suffering for...  
The ones who also heal you – are there for you.  
Sometimes just being there for someone else is enough.  
You can tell that high school is going to be dramatic.  
You spend too much time being sad over a guy who doesn't care  
You understand now that you were his default option and nothing more  
Your horoscope tells you that something wonderful is going to happen to you today  
You wish for simple things like Smarties in the vending machines  
And you get your happiness back.

The year goes by in record time  
Although you never really took the time to dissect it; to figure it all out  
You see that you survived – even those most dreadful days  
As you look back, you appreciate all that you've accomplished,  
You recognize how much you've grown and how you've changed  
You are beginning to comprehend that being real isn't about how you are made  
And that it doesn't happen all at once...

You realize that you are becoming this new  
Amazing person.

You realize that you  
Have the courage to be.

## **Final Thoughts**

It is hoped that the words, images and ideas originating with this study's participants will serve as impetus for further research into how high schools need to evolve in order to address the unique learning needs of the creatively-inclined students in today's classrooms. These are students who, like Lee, Ally, Alexis, Leila and Britany, are sometimes irresistibly tempted to say, "This is stupid!" when given yet another assignment that does not challenge creatively or engage them intellectually. Ideally, the findings and insights arising from this study will encourage us as educators to refrain from blaming students for their often painfully honest responses, and to look instead at the contributing role our institutions play in school failure. The research findings here have demonstrated that the creatively-inclined participants in this study longed for curriculum that is intellectually engaging, socially relevant and emotionally significant. To this end, they require school administrators with the insight and flexibility to implement transition programming that both addresses their psychosocial needs and provides scope for them to develop their creative potential.

## APPENDIX A: Survey for High School Students in Grade Nine

*Please read each of the following statements. Decide whether or not you agree with each statement and then select that box that most accurately reflects your feelings.*

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I have access to a computer at home.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I use a computer to complete my school assignments.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am very comfortable using a computer.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I use email on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I keep an online journal and/or blog.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I use Facebook to stay in touch with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I regularly use MSN to talk to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I have very good attendance at school.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I enjoy going to school each day.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I always complete my homework.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I get high marks at school.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I like drawing and/or painting.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I enjoy making music (e.g. playing my guitar, singing).	1	2	3	4	5
14. I enjoy creative writing.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I keep a personal diary.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I am a very creative person.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I have a lot of friends at school.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I get along well with my teachers.	1	2	3	4	5

*Please complete each of the following statements.*

My favourite subject at school is: \_\_\_\_\_.

Activities I enjoy doing when I have free time are: \_\_\_\_\_.

A creative person is someone who: \_\_\_\_\_.

When I graduate from high school, I would like to: \_\_\_\_\_.

My parents would describe me as: \_\_\_\_\_.

Ten years from now, I think I will be: \_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print your full name!)

I would be interested in participating in this study: Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

My phone number is: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of my school: \_\_\_\_\_





## **APPENDIX B: Letter of Information for Consent to Participate in Research**

### **Perspectives of Creative Adolescents on Their First Year of High School**

Your child has been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Anne Arthur (Graduate Student) under the supervision of Dr. Terry Sefton (Dissertation Supervisor) from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The results of the research study will contribute to a doctoral dissertation for the Joint PhD in Educational Studies Program.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact: **Dr. Terry Sefton (519) 253-3000 Ext: 3832.** and/or **Anne Arthur (905) 668-5881 Ext. 6280.**

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** The study is designed to assess how creatively-inclined students experience and manage their first year of Secondary school.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

As part of the research study, participants will initially be asked to do the following:

- Complete a one-page survey

Depending on the responses to the survey, we will invite some respondents to participate in a three-month case study. If you are selected as part of the case study, we will ask participants to do the following:

- Participate in three audio-recorded, one-hour interviews at a convenient location;
- Complete a written standardized assessment that is designed to measure their aptitudes as creative thinkers. The test is called The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT);
- Record their thoughts and feelings about high school, on a daily basis for two weeks, during their second semester of Grade Nine – using the multi-modal response journal provided by researcher (Anne Arthur);
- Allow the researcher (Anne Arthur) to access a copy of their Ontario Provincial Report Card while they are in Grade Nine.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

- Potential for psychological risk of embarrassment: to minimize this risk, participants will have the opportunity to review and make changes to all written descriptions of the journal content and interview transcripts.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Participation in this study may help students to process some of your concerns about high school. Sharing those concerns in discussions with a researcher may help them to understand the issues and to engage in some worthwhile problem solving.

The findings of this study may also help teachers and principals to understand why students feel engaged or disengaged in Grade Nine. The findings might also lead to the creation of more effective transition programs to help students during their first year of high school.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:**

Participants will receive an honorarium of \$25.00 at the end of each interview session. They will also receive \$25.00 when they submit their response journal. A small token gift (e.g. cool pen) and a certificate of appreciation for their participation in the research study will also be provided by the primary investigator.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with participants will remain confidential, and will be disclosed only with signed permission.

- All researchers involved with the study will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement;
- A coded number (not the participant's name) will be used on all written data while the information is being collected;
- Participants will have an opportunity to review any of the transcripts of audio-recordings of the interview sessions, as well as any written descriptions of their response journal content, and to change the wording if they feel that is important;
- Audio-recordings, transcripts and copies of the response journals will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's possession. **Note:** *Response journals will be photocopied and returned to participants;*
- The audio-recordings will be erased one year after the final report has been written;
- Real names will not be used in the final report.
- Response journal data will not include personal photographs and/or comments from participants' individual friends, relatives and/or acquaintances.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participants can choose whether to be part of this study or not. If they volunteer to do so, they may withdraw at any time, without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer any questions they don't want to answer, and still remain in the study. The investigator may choose to end their participation in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

**FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS**

- The research report will be available in the University of Windsor Library.
- A reader-friendly summary of the initial results will be made available through the Durham District School Board's Accountability and Assessment Department.
- Web address: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/ledy>
- Research results will also be posted on the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board website under Study Results: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb)
- Date when results are available: 1 year after completion of the written report

**SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA:** This data will be used in subsequent studies.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS:**

Participants may withdraw their consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR:** These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date



## **APPENDIX C: Consent to Participate in Research**

### **Perspectives of Creative Adolescents on Their First Year of High School**

Your child has been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Anne Arthur under the supervision of Dr. Terry Sefton, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. The present research study is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirements for the Joint PhD Educational Studies Program at the University of Windsor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact: **Dr. Terry Sefton (519) 253-3000 Ext: 3832** and/or **Anne Arthur (905) 668-5881 Ext. 6280**.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** The study is designed to assess how creatively- inclined students experience and manage their first year of high school.

### **PROCEDURES**

As part of the research study, participants will initially be asked to do the following:

- **Complete a one-page survey**

Depending on the responses to the survey, respondents will be invited to participate in a case study. As part of the case study, participants will be asked to do the following:

- **Participate in three audio-recorded, one-hour interviews at a convenient location;**
- **Complete a written standardized assessment that is designed to measure their aptitudes as creative thinkers. The test is called The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT);**
- **Record their thoughts and feelings about high school, on a daily basis for two weeks, during their second semester in Grade Nine – using the multi-modal response journal provided by the researcher (Anne Arthur);**
- **Allow the researcher (Anne Arthur) to access a copy of their Ontario Provincial Report card while they are in Grade Nine.**

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

- **Potential for psychological risk of embarrassment: to minimize this risk, participants will have the opportunity to review and make changes to all written descriptions of the journal content and interview transcripts.**

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participation in this study may help students to process some of their concerns about high school. Sharing those concerns in discussions with a researcher may help them to understand the issues and to engage in some worthwhile problem-solving. It will also help them to understand privacy issues concerning social networking sites.

The findings of this study may also help teachers and principals to understand why students feel engaged or disengaged in Grade Nine. The findings might also lead to the creation of more effective transition programs to help students during their first year of high school.

## PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will receive an honorarium of \$25.00 at the end of each interview session. They will also receive \$25.00 when they submit their response journal. A small token gift (e.g. cool pen) and a certificate of appreciation for their participation in this research study will also be provided by the primary investigator.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with participants will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with signed permission.

- All researchers involved with the study will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement;
- A coded number (not the participant's name) will be used on all written data while the information is being collected;
- Participants will have an opportunity to review any of the transcripts of audio-recordings of the interview sessions, as well as any written descriptions of their response journal content and to change the wording if they feel that is important;
- Audio-recording, transcripts and copies of the response journals will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's possession **Note:** *Response journals will be photocopied and returned to participants;*
- The audio-recordings will be erased one year after the final report has been written;
- Real names will not be used in the final report.
- Response journal data will not include photographs and/or comments from participants' individual friends, relatives and/or acquaintances.

## PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participants can choose whether to take part in this study or not. If they volunteer to do so, they may withdraw at any time, without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer any questions they don't want to answer, and still remain in the study. The investigator may choose to end their participation in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS

- The research report will be available in the University of Windsor Library.
- A reader-friendly summary of the initial results will be made available through the Durham District School Board's Accountability and Assessment Department.
- Web address: <http://www.uwindsor.ca/ledy>
- Research results will also be posted on the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board website under Study Results: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb)
- Date when results are available: 1 year after completion of the written report

**SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA:** This data will be used in subsequent studies.

## RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Participants may withdraw their consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your child's rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

## SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study "**Perspectives of Creative Adolescents on Their First Year of High School**" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## **APPENDIX D: Survey Assent for Secondary School Children**

I am a graduate student researcher at the University of Windsor, and I am doing a study on how teenagers manage their first year of high school. I would like to ask you to complete the attached survey.

When I have reviewed the responses to this survey, I may ask you to be part of my study. A written report of my research findings will be submitted to and reviewed by my professors at the university. When the report is accepted, it will be bound and be kept on file in the University of Windsor library.

It is important for you to know that I will not be sharing your answers with your teachers, your parents or your peers. The only exception will be if you indicate to me that someone is hurting you. If I think that you are being hurt or abused, I will need to tell someone who is in a position to help you. Otherwise, I promise to keep everything that you share with me confidential and private.

Your parent(s) and/or guardian(s) have agreed to your participation in this study. You have the right to decide that you do not want to complete the survey. If, at any point, you decide that you no longer want to complete the survey, you have the right to end your participation. It will be entirely up to you. Would you like to complete the survey?

I understand what I am being asked to do in this study, and I agree to be in this study.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Witness



## **APPENDIX E: Case Study Assent for Secondary School Children**

I am a graduate student researcher at the University of Windsor, and I am doing a study on how adolescents manage their first year of high school. Based on your survey responses, I would like to invite you to be part of my study.

As part of this study, you will be asked to document your experiences in high school using the response journal I will provide for you. I would also like to interview you two times throughout the school year (May and June). During the first interview, you will be invited to take a short standardized test designed to measure your aptitude as a creative thinker. You will also be asked to provide me with permission to view a copy of your Ontario Provincial Report Card that will tell me how you have been doing in school.

When I have completed my research, I will write a report on my findings. You will have a chance to review what I have written before it is submitted to my professors at the university. When the report is accepted, it will be bound and kept on file in the University of Windsor library.

It is important for you to know that I will not be sharing your thoughts with your teachers, your parents or your peers. The only exception will be if you indicate to me that someone is hurting you. If I think that you are being hurt or abused, I will need to tell someone who is in a position to help you. *(Note: This will include the information you share during the interviews and in your response journal.)* Otherwise, I promise to keep everything that you share with me confidential and private.

Your parent(s) and/or legal guardian(s) have agreed to your participation in this study. You have the right to decide that you do not want to participate. If, at any point, you decide that you no longer want to participate, you have the right to leave. It will be entirely up to you. Do you wish to get involved in this study?

I understand what I am being asked to do to be in this study, and I agree to be in this study.

---

**Signature**

---

**Date**

---

**Witness**



## **APPENDIX F: Assent for Audio Recording**

**Participant's Name:**

**Title of the Project:**

Perspectives of Creative Adolescents on Their Year of High School

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview sessions.

I understand these are voluntary interviews and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the audio-recording be discontinued. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that the audio-tape will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and stored in a secure area.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and the materials will be for professional use only.

---

Signature of Participant

---

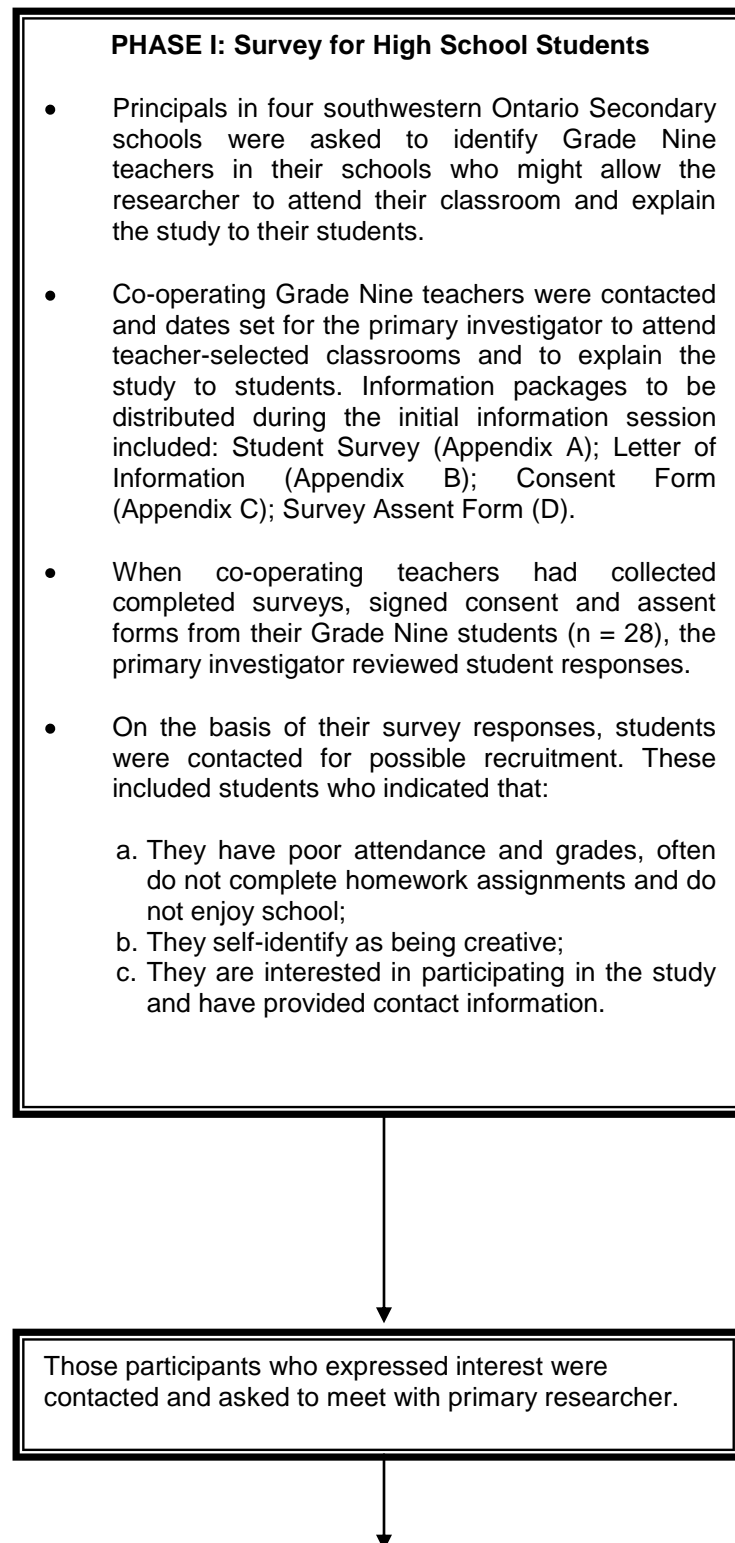
Date



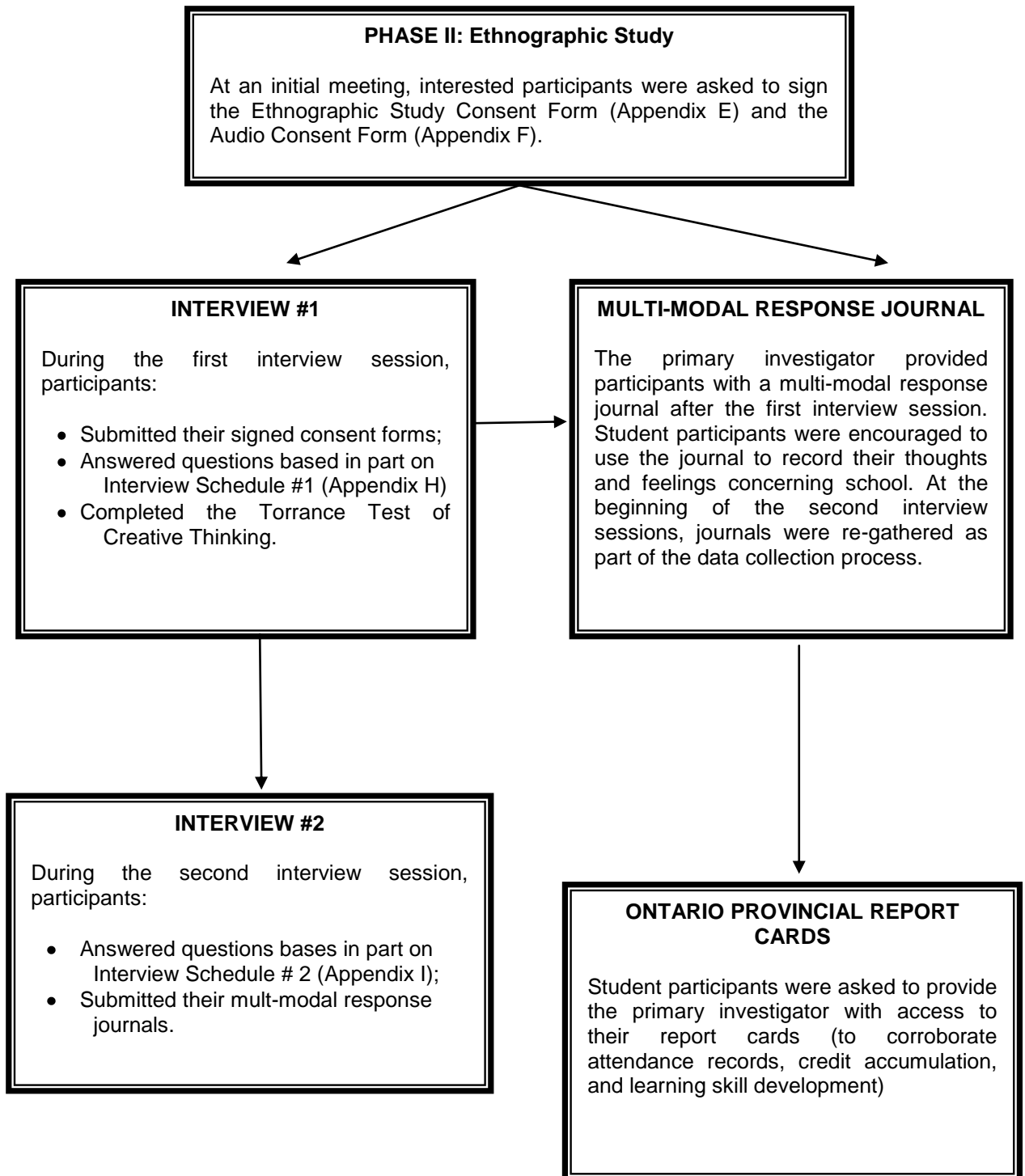
## APPENDIX G: Flow Chart (Phases I & II)

### Perspectives of Creative Adolescents on their First Year of High School:

#### PHASE I



## PHASE II



## APPENDIX H: Schedule – Interview #1

After initial introductions and informal greetings, the interview began with a reminder that this is a confidential interview and would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only. (*Note: Signed audio consent forms were collected before the audio-recording began.*)

The participant was also reminded to answer the questions as honestly and thoughtfully as possible; however the participant also had the option of NOT answering a question or withdrawing from the interview at any point.

At the beginning of the interview, the participant received \$50.00 for their participation in the study (even if the participant chose to withdraw from the study before the end of the interview and decided not to do the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking).

1. What has your life this past year been like in terms of your:
  - Family responsibilities – what are your family responsibilities?
  - Recreational activities – what do you do for fun?
  - Employment opportunities – do you have a part time job?
  - Social life with peers – do you spend a lot of time with friends outside of school?
2. Before we begin to talk about Grade Nine specifically, let's take a few minutes to talk about your elementary school experience. What was elementary school like for you in terms of your:
  - Likes – what did you like about elementary school?
  - Dislikes – what did you dislike about elementary school?
  - Skills – what were you good at?
  - Extracurricular activities and sports – what sports or activities did you participate in?
  - Friendships – did you have lots of loyal friends in elementary school or were you lonely?
  - Relationships with teachers – how did you get along with your teachers?
  - Attendance – what was your attendance like?
  - Grades – what subjects were you good at or not so good at?
3. Now let's talk about Grade Nine. Did you attend any Grade Nine orientation sessions? What did those sessions include?
4. Take a few minutes to think about what your first day of school was like. Describe that first day. *[NOTE: Allow student time to answer this question before you begin the bulleted list below.]*

What about that first day in terms of:

- Transportation – did you take a bus, did you walk or did you get a ride to school?

- Clothing and school supplies – had you thought about what you would wear and what you would bring with you?
  - Classes – what did the teachers do with you that first day?
  - Administration – did you need to get your books or sign any forms?
  - Peers – had you made arrangements to go to school with any of your friends?
  - Feelings – how did you feel that first day of Grade Nine?
5. Now that you've been in Grade Nine for most of a year, do you have any concerns or worries about Grade Nine? *[NOTE: Allow student time to answer this question before you begin the bulleted list below.]*

Any worries or concerns about:

- Friendships – do you have friends at your new school?
  - Workload – what has the workload been like?
  - Exams – are you concerned about what exams will be like?
  - Teacher expectations – have teacher expectations been reasonable for you?
  - Relationships – have you been getting along with all your teachers?
  - Grades to date – what have your grades been like? What kinds of things have teachers said about your work or written on your assignments?
  - Attendance to date – late for class, detentions
6. What courses did you take last semester? What courses did you take this semester? How did you decide what courses to take?
7. Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities? If so, what are they?
8. Are you involved in any activities (outside the school), such as:
- Employment – part time jobs?
  - Religious groups – youth groups?
  - Creative pursuits – drama, music, art
  - Sports – figure skating, team sports
  - Service groups – Scouts, Girl Guides, Cadets?
  - Other?
9. How has your second semester of Grade Nine been different from your first semester? How has it been the same?
10. Describe your typical school day in terms of:
- Morning Routine - wake-up call, shower routine, breakfast?
  - Transportation – do you typically take a bus, walk or get a ride to school?
  - Classes – courses and schedule
  - Lunch hour – where you eat, what you eat and who you eat lunch with?
  - Dismissal – time and how/when you get home?
  - After school activities – at school or at home?
  - Homework routines – where and when you do homework

- Evening routines – television, computer, socializing with family and/or friends
11. What do you like MOST about being in Grade Nine? Explain your answer.
  12. What do you like LEAST about being in Grade Nine? Explain your answer.
  13. What would you tell a student in Grade 8 about what Grade Nine will be like for them?
  14. What would you offer as a strategy for success in high school?
  15. Are you ever bored in high school? Where are you, and what are you doing when you are most likely to feel bored?
  16. What do you feel like when you are bored?
  17. What do you do when you feel bored?
  18. When do you feel happiest at school? Explain why.
  19. In the final analysis, was high school all that you imagined it to be? Why or why not?
  20. Is there anything you'd like to say about your Grade Nine experience that you haven't had a chance to say?

NOTE: At the end of the interview students were reminded that they have the option of reviewing the transcription of interviews as well as the written descriptions of the content on their Journal entries. They were also provided with an opportunity to ask questions and address any concerns they had concerning the research study.

NOTE: At the end of the interview, students were asked to complete the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT).

## **APPENDIX I: Schedule – Interview #2**

After informal greetings, the interview began with a reminder that this is a confidential interview and would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes only.

The participant was also reminded to answer the questions as honestly and thoughtfully as possible; however the participant also had the option of NOT answering a question or withdrawing from the interview at any point.

At the beginning of the interview, the participant received \$50.00 for their participation in the study (even if the participant chose to withdraw from the study before the end of the interview).

Students were asked to refer to their multi-modal journals while answering the first interview question.

1. Let's begin, by talking about your journal. What did you include in your journal and why did you include what you have included?
  - a. What does the journal tell me about you?
  - b. What does the journal tell me about your experience in Grade Nine?
2. What are you hoping to do when you are finished high school?
3. Have your plans for after high school changed since you started Grade Nine? If so, how have they changed? If not, why have they remained the same?
4. What optional credits will you be taking next year? Explain why you have selected them.
5. Will you be involved in any extracurricular activities or clubs next year? If so, which ones and why have you selected them?
6. In your survey, you said that you saw yourself as a creative person. Do you still see yourself as being a creative or artsy person? Explain why or why not.
7. If you can imagine what your life will be like in ten years, will it involve any creative pursuits? If so, what will you be doing in terms of your creative hopes and dreams?
8. Are there any courses and/or activities at school that seemed to meet your creative needs? i.e., that allowed you to see the work in a new way? Which courses and activities were there? Tell me about these courses and/or activities.
9. A lot of the participants in this study have talked about how Grade Nine provided them with an opportunity to change who they were and to present them selves in a new light. Did you see Grade Nine as a chance to do that?

10. How are you different from when you were in Grade Eight?
11. If you had a chance to do Grade Nine all over again and could do it differently, what would you change? Explain why.
12. Which of the following sentences best describes your high school experience so far? Explain why it does.
- a. School is incredibly boring and as soon as I'm old enough, I'm out of here.
  - b. School is a lot of work, but I have enjoyed the challenge.
  - c. If it weren't for my extracurricular activities, I would hate going to school.
  - d. I only go to school to see my friends and to hang out with them.
  - e. I have felt a lot of stress about school this year and have dreaded going to school most days.
  - f. I have a good time at school and enjoy all my classes.
13. Will you be returning to the same school next year? Explain why or why not.
14. Do you think you will graduate from high school on time? Explain why or why not.
15. In one sentence, word or phrase, describe what high school has been like for you.
16. If you had a magic wand and could change any aspect of high school, what would you change?
17. What are your plans for the summer?

## APPENDIX J: Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking

### TORRANCE TESTS of CREATIVE THINKING (TTCT)

#### Verbal TTCT: Thinking Creatively with Words

Developed by Dr. E. Paul Torrance, the **Verbal TTCT: Thinking Creatively with Words** is a 45-minute standardized test designed to assess a participant's ability to think in creative and innovative ways. Appropriate for first graders through adults, the **Verbal TTCT** uses six word-based exercises to assess three mental characteristics:

- fluency
- flexibility
- originality

These exercises provide participants with opportunities to ask questions, to improve products, and to “just suppose.”

The **Verbal TTCT** can be scored locally or by the Scholastic Testing Services (for a fee). If a researcher chooses to score the test locally, the **Manual for Scoring and Interpreting Results** provides an easy-to-use scoring method. The **Verbal TTCT** uses one set of grade-related and age-appropriate norms for each of the grades, including the adult level. Age-related norms are based on the typical age for each of the grades in which the **Verbal TTCT** may be used. They range from age six to eighteen years and beyond.

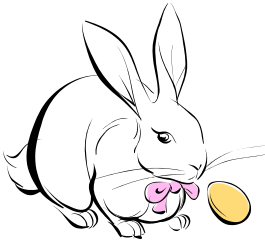
Required for local scoring, the **Verbal Norms-Technical Manual** includes 2007 national norm tables with standard scores and national percentiles by grade and age for each score area. Both manuals are required for local scoring.



## SAMPLE: Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking—Verbal

**Directions:** Do not begin until you are told to do so.

- Try to think of things that no one else will think of.
- Try to think of as many ideas as possible.
- Add details to your ideas to make them complete.
- If you finish before time is up, you may continue to add details or sit quietly.
- Please do not go to the next activity until told to do so.



**Activity 1:** Try to improve this stuffed toy rabbit so that it will be more fun to play with. You have 3 minutes.

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**Activity 2:** Just suppose that people could transport themselves from place to place with just a wink of the eye or a twitch of the nose. What might be some things that would happen as a result? You have 3 minutes.

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## APPENDIX K: Confidentiality Agreement

**Primary Investigator: Anne Arthur**

***Research Study: Perspectives of Creative Adolescents on Their First Year of High School***

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### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

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Confidential information is defined as any information concerning participants that is not public information and that has been divulged as part of this research study.

I shall not, either during or after the period of employment/engagement with this research study, except in the proper course of my duties or as permitted by the study or as required by law, divulge to any person any confidential information concerning a participant's personal information.

I undertake not to knowingly access any confidential information about the participants unless such information is essential for me to properly and efficiently perform my duties.

Confidential matters involving participants will not be discussed in areas or circumstances where they might be overheard by other participants or by third parties unrelated to the Research Study.

I agree that any violation of confidentiality, in whole or in part, could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment or service contract and/or legal action.

I have received a copy of, read, understand and agree to uphold this written policy on matters of confidential information.

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Name (please print)

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Signature

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Date

## APPENDIX L: Summary of Provincial Report Card Results

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: GAIL</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 90%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	84 / 86 73 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has achieved Grade Nine English credit</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	7	0
CGC 1D	93 / 88 77 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully met course expectations in Geography</li> <li>• Demonstrates a thorough understanding of Geography curriculum</li> <li>• Is encouraged to pursue further courses in Geography</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	7	0
BTT 1O	93 / 90 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully met course expectations for Introduction to Information Tech.</li> <li>• Congratulations on a great year</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	8	0
AVI 1O	98 / 95 78 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully met course expectations for Grade Nine Visual Arts</li> <li>• Should continue exploration of skills developed in class to strengthen her abilities</li> <li>• Is encouraged to take Grade Ten Visual Arts</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	7	0
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: GAIL</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 87%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	94 / 95 80 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has demonstrated superior understanding and application of course material</li> <li>• Has successfully completed course expectations for Grade Nine French</li> <li>• Congratulations</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	6	0
PPL 1O	85 / 85 85 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has successfully completed Grade Nine Physical and Health Education</li> <li>• Grade Ten Physical and Health Education recommended</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	9	0
MPM 1D	75 / 77 78 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has successfully completed Grade Nine enriched Mathematics</li> <li>• Should review material over the summer for Grade Ten Academic Mathematics</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	9	0
SNC 1D	98 / 92 71 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has completed the requirements for Grade Nine academic Science highly successfully</li> <li>• Is encouraged to pursue further studies at the enriched level</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	5	0

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: NIKI</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 89%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1P	97 / 93 86 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a solid understanding of all concepts covered in French</li> <li>Has ability to do well in Grade Ten French</li> <li>Needs to improve her focus in class</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	0	0
ADA 1O	90 / 90 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates an outstanding level of participation and involvement in class work</li> <li>Strives to work to her fullest potential</li> <li>Shows an aptitude in drama and should continue studies in this area</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	0	0
CGC 1O	97 / 94 77 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully completed the course</li> <li>Is encouraged to pursue further studies in Geography</li> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Has demonstrated a level in organization and commitment to learning</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	1	0
SNC 1D	81 / 80 74 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a thorough understanding of the Science concepts</li> <li>Has submitted homework and labs on time</li> <li>Should keep up the great effort</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	2	0
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: NIKI</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 90%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	96 / 90 84 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has exceeded expectations in reading and literature studies strand</li> <li>Should focus on meeting course assignment expectations to ensure higher level of success</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	5	4
PPL 1O	88 / 90 85 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully completed Grade Nine Physical and Health Education</li> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Grade Ten Physical and Health Education recommended</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	5	0
AMI 1O	95 / 95 87 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully met requirements for Gr. 9 Instrumental Music</li> <li>Should continue to practice regularly</li> <li>Should continue her studies in music by taking AMI 2O or AME 2O next year</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	3	0
MPM 1D	89 / 85 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully completed course requirements</li> <li>Should pursue her studies in Mathematics at this level next year</li> </ul>	E	E	G	E	E	3	1

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: LEE</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 72%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1P	88 / 82 66 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Completed course expectations with distinction</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	3	1
ATC 1O	79 / 83 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses performance skills with a high degree of effectiveness</li> <li>• Strives to work at her fullest potential</li> <li>• Has successfully completed the semester in dance</li> <li>• Should consider taking Grade Ten Dance</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	5	2
CGC 1D	70 / 56 77 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully met course expectations in Geography with difficulty</li> <li>• Demonstrates limited knowledge of Geography curriculum</li> <li>• A more concerted effort would produce better results</li> </ul>	N	N	N	N	N	6	0
HIF 1O	71 / 68 62 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has demonstrated a fair understanding of individuals and families</li> <li>• Remains unfocused in class and has not properly prepared for tests and exams</li> <li>• Should participate more often and review frequently</li> </ul>	S	G	G	S	S	3	2
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: LEE</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 65%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	65 / 65 71 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully completed ENG 1D and is prepared for ENG2D</li> <li>• Had strong exam results and culminating activity mark</li> <li>• Has demonstrated that more effort can result in higher marks</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	S	9	0
PPL 1O	85 / 86 85 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has successfully completed Grade Nine Physical and Health Education</li> <li>• Grade Ten Physical and Health Education recommended</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	1	4
MPM 1D	50 / 53 56 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has successfully completed Grade Nine academic Mathematics course</li> <li>• Repeating the course is highly recommended for further studies at the academic level</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	S	8	5
SNC 1D	55 / 54 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has completed the requirements for Grade Nine academic Science with difficulty</li> <li>• Needs to review course materials over the summer to ensure higher academic success</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	N	7	0

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: ALLY</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 75%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	70 / 68 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is a pleasure to teach and has successfully completed the Grade Nine course</li> <li>Is encouraged to take further studies in French</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	13	0
ATC 1O	79 / 80 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses performance skills with a high degree of effectiveness</li> <li>Strives to work at her fullest potential</li> <li>Has successfully completed the semester in dance</li> <li>Should consider taking Grade Ten Dance</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	7	0
ENG 1D	71/ 70 73 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Has achieved Grade Nine English credit</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	9	0
AMV 1O	73/ 80 80 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully completed course requirements for Grade Nine Vocal Music</li> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Should continue practicing her singing skills</li> <li>Is encouraged to take Vocal Music in Grade Ten</li> </ul>	G	E	G	G	G	8	0
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: ALLY</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 61%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
CGC 1D	55 / 60 70 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully met course requirements in Geography</li> <li>Demonstrates moderate knowledge of Geography curriculum</li> <li>More consistent effort required for success in future Geography courses</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	S	5	0
PPL 1O	83 / 76 85 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully completed Grade Nine Physical and Health Education</li> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Grade Ten Physical and Health Education recommended</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	5	3
MPM 1D	50 / 50 55 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Congratulations on receiving the credit for Grade Nine academic Mathematics</li> <li>Should change from academic level to applied level in Mathematics next year</li> </ul>	N	N	S	N	N	3	2
SNC 1D	55 / 56 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has completed the requirements for Grade Nine academic Science with difficulty</li> <li>Needs to review course materials over the summer</li> <li>Congratulations</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	7	2

Report Card Results – Semester One: ALEXIS									
September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 73%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
PPL 1O	51 / 53 76 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Performs movement skills with limited degree of competency</li><li>Struggles with written components of the course</li><li>Has completed minimum requirements of the Gr. 9 Physical Education course</li></ul>	S	S	S	S	N	17	5
GLE 1O	88 / 88 80 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>is able to identify and apply several learning strategies to promote success in school</li><li>Is a serious worker</li><li>Is to be commended for her effort</li><li>Should keep up the good work</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	12	8
MAT 1L	81 / 76 68 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Has a good understanding of mathematical concepts presented</li><li>Is organized and prepared for most aspects of learning</li><li>Has good work habits and is encouraged to continue in same manner next year in Grade Ten Mathematics</li></ul>	N	G	G	G	G	8	0
SNC 1L	72 / 76 64 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates considerable understanding of the skills and concepts presented</li><li>Is inconsistent in her effort and this had impacted her grade</li><li>Congratulations</li></ul>	S	G	G	S	G	8	0
Report Card Results – Semester Two: ALEXIS									
February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 68%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1P	82 / 63 65 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates some understanding of ideas, concepts and themes in literary texts</li><li>Needs to focus on improving writing and oral communication skills</li><li>Has successfully completed this course</li></ul>	G	G	G	G	G	14	3
CGC 1P	73 / 63 66 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can analyze / communicate geographical concepts and ideas with moderate clarity</li><li>Must focus on completion of all assignments and work to full potential</li><li>Has met course expectations in Geography</li></ul>	G	S	S	G	S	10	1
HIF 1O	72 / 80 76 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Should continue her good work habits</li><li>Is able to apply practical skills to meet family needs</li><li>Has successfully met expectations and should study social science courses</li></ul>	G	G	G	G	G	11	0
BTT 1O	61 / 65 72 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates some knowledge of Business and IT facts and terms</li><li>Demonstrated a consistent effort throughout the terms</li><li>Has completed the Grade Nine BTT1O program</li></ul>	G	G	G	G	G	11	1

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: LEILA</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 60%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ATC 1O	58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates some interest in technical, theoretical and creative aspects of dance</li> <li>• Should continue developing her fitness skills</li> <li>• Has completed the semester in dance</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	S	9	2
ENG 1D	56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully completed the Grade Nine English</li> <li>• Progress has been hindered by inconsistent efforts this term</li> <li>• Is encouraged to remain on task without reminders</li> </ul>	G	G	S	S	G	9	5
CGC 1D	54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a limited understanding of principles in Canadian Geography – as evidenced by marks</li> <li>• Should hand in all assignments and consider required timelines</li> <li>• Needs to develop regular work habits</li> </ul>	N	S	N	N	N	8	3
AVI 1O	73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates artistic ability</li> <li>• Must improve concentration and focus in class during class activities</li> <li>• Should take responsibility for maintaining materials/products and work area in the classroom</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	S	8	9
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: LEILA</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 53%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	59 79 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has experienced difficulties with several expectations in this course</li> <li>• Needs to take more responsibility for her own learning</li> <li>• Must come to class on time and prepared to work</li> </ul>	N	N	N	N	N	25	14
PPL 1O	51 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs to attend class and participate on a regular basis</li> <li>• Needs to put forth a consistent effort</li> <li>• Has failed to complete a summative assignment which has impacted her final grade</li> </ul>	S	S	N	S	N	26	13
TFJ 1O	65 81 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies principles related to preparation, presentation and service of food products with some effectiveness</li> <li>• Must attend more regularly</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	S	18	9
SNC 1P	37 62 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has not met the expectations for the Grade Nine Science course</li> <li>• Needs to put forth a consistent effort when she repeats this course</li> <li>• Summer school is an option</li> </ul>	N	N	N	N	N	20	6



Report Card Results – Semester One: BRITANY									
September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 59%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ADA 1O	55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates a limited grasp of dramatic expression</li><li>Inconsistent participation and effort – is reflected in her final grade</li><li>Is encouraged to complete all written and performance assignments</li></ul>	S	S	S	S	S	11	2
ENG 1P	63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Meets many of the expectations in reading and literature studies strand</li><li>Must make better use of class time to complete assignments</li><li>Has successfully completed Grade Nine English</li></ul>	G	G	G	G	G	10	0
MFM 1P	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates some understanding of mathematical concepts presented</li><li>Needs to make better use of class time and focus on assigned tasks</li><li>Must ensure that assignments are completed and seek extra help when required</li></ul>	S	S	S	S	S	17	1
AMV 1O	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Is continuing to develop her musical skills</li><li>Demonstrates some knowledge of music theory</li><li>Should continue regular home practice and listen to different styles of music</li></ul>	N	N	N	N	N	11	1
Report Card Results – Semester Two: BRITANY									
February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 71%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	56 64 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Communicates in the target language with limited effectiveness</li><li>Must ensure that assignments are completed and submitted on time</li><li>Is encouraged to seek extra help</li></ul>	S	S	S	S	S	9	0
CGC 1P	78 64 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Questions and evaluates geographical situations with considerable effectiveness</li><li>Continues to bring a positive attitude to the learning environment</li><li>Is encouraged to continue to think critically about geographical issues</li></ul>	G	G	G	G	G	16	2
TFJ 1O	85 81 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Applies principles related to preparation, presentation and service of food products with a high degree of effectiveness</li><li>Attends class regularly and is always on task in practical work</li><li>Should continue her great work</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	13	0
SNC 1P	65 62 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates some understanding of skills and concepts presented in this course</li><li>Is a positive influence for other class members</li><li>Is encouraged to take time to reflect on and revise her work</li></ul>	G	G	G	G	G	11	1

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: RITA</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 80%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ATC 1O	75 / 74 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates considerable level of participation and involvement in class work</li> <li>Has greatly improved her abilities in dance</li> <li>Has successfully completed course and should consider taking Grade Ten Dance</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	0	0
ADA 1O	83 / 80 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates outstanding level of participation and involvement in class work</li> <li>Strives to work to her fullest potential</li> <li>Shows aptitude in Drama and should continue studies in this area</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	2	0
PPL 1O	93 / 90 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Has successfully completed PPL 1O</li> <li>Should continue studies in PPL 2O</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	2	0
SNC 1P	88 / 75 67 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Congratulations</li> <li>Has had a successful semester in Science</li> <li>Excellent effort in daily work has resulted in high achievement</li> <li>Has strong ability in this subject area and should continue her hard work in the future</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	1	0
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: RITA</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 67%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1P	86 / 76 78 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has worked well this semester</li> <li>Has successfully completed Grade Nine French</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	4	0
ENG 1D	83 / 80 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes a variety of text forms and features and understands their uses</li> <li>Should continue to take academic risks</li> <li>Is encouraged to take time to reflect on and revise her work</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	1	0
CGC 1D	61 / 60 77 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has successfully met course expectations in Geography</li> <li>Demonstrates moderate knowledge of Geography curriculum</li> <li>More consistent effort required to produce better results in future Geography courses</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	4	0
MPM 1D	52 / 50 55 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Congratulations on receiving credit for the Grade Nine academic Mathematics course</li> <li>Should switch to applied level in Mathematics next year</li> </ul>	N	S	S	S	N	2	3

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: SHELLY</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 72%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	87 / 84 86 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates a consistent effort throughout</li> <li>• Needs to participate more in class to improve her skills</li> <li>• Has the ability to do well in Grade Ten French</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	3	6
CGC 1D	73 / 60 77 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully met course expectations in Geography</li> <li>• Demonstrates moderate knowledge of Geography curriculum</li> <li>• More consistent effort required to produce better results in future Geography courses</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	4	1
BTT 1O	70 / 76 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully completed the requirements for Grade Nine Business Technology</li> <li>• Has had a strong second half of semester – congratulations</li> <li>• Should consider taking BBI 2O and TGJ 2O next year</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	4	2
SNC 1D	70 / 67 74 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has put in a consistent effort for most of the semester</li> <li>• Work habits have declined in the past few weeks and marks dropped as a result</li> <li>• Is encouraged to work hard throughout the semester</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	3	0
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: SHELLY</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 77%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	87 / 78 85 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicates clearly and coherently for different purposes</li> <li>• Needs more consistency in submission of assignments and homework completion</li> <li>• Should clarify course expectations</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	7	0
PPL 1O	86 / 81 85 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has successfully completed Grade Nine Physical and Health Education</li> <li>• Grade Ten Physical and Health Education recommended</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	7	3
AMK 1D	94 / 88 89 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has successfully completed the requirements for Grade Nine Keyboarding</li> <li>• Should practice regularly</li> <li>• Should consider taking Keyboard Music in Grade Ten</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	7	5
MPM 1D	64 / 60 55 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations</li> <li>• Has successfully completed Grade Nine academic Mathematics course</li> <li>• Has put in a good effort this semester</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	6	2

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: ANNA</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 73%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	81 / 71 74 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates a positive attitude to language learning</li> <li>Has shown an improvement in oral responses and written assignments</li> <li>Should keep up the good work</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	4	0
HIF 1O	84 / 81 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates an excellent understanding of Family Living terms and concepts</li> <li>Has consistently worked hard throughout the semester</li> <li>Is a pleasure to have in the classroom</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	6	1
MPM 1D	65 / 67 70 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Puts forth a consistent effort</li> <li>Demonstrates some understanding of the properties of slope and y-intercept</li> <li>Should review her notes to prepare for the Grade Ten Mathematics course</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	3	0
SNC 1D	69 / 74 72 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes considerable connections between Science and life outside the school</li> <li>Contributes positively in classroom activities</li> <li>Has successfully completed Grade Nine Science</li> </ul>	S	G	G	G	S	4	2
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: ANNA</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 78%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	81 / 80 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is able to analyze, interpret and assess with a high degree of effectiveness</li> <li>Has a strong ability to identify and restate the main ideas and to cite supporting details</li> <li>Uses detailed explanations in written work</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	10	3
CGC 1D	78 / 74 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates results of geographic inquiry and analysis with clarity</li> <li>Demonstrates a general understanding of concepts and terms related to Grade Nine Geography</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	6	0
PPL 1O	83 / 82 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always puts forth a determined effort</li> <li>Performs movement skills with considerable competency</li> <li>Has successfully completed course expectations with honours</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	8	4
BTT 1O	71 / 76 75 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can often apply Business and IT concepts to new situations</li> <li>Uses computer software applications with considerable degree of effectiveness</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	6	0

<b>Report Card Results – Semester One: STACEY</b> September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 74%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	78	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates in a clear, concise manner for different purposes</li> <li>Asks questions for clarification and to ensure understanding</li> <li>Should continue to develop her increasingly sophisticated writing style</li> </ul>	G	G	G	G	G	9	0
CGC 1D	59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a limited understanding of the principles of Canadian Geography</li> <li>Should consider timelines and complete all assignments</li> <li>Must develop regular work habits</li> </ul>	N	S	N	N	N	9	0
TFJ 1O	88	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applies ideas, skills and safety procedures on new recipe projects with a high degree of effectiveness</li> <li>Shows exceptional skill when working with tools and equipment on tasks</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	10	2
SNC 1D	70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has a positive attitude and works well in class</li> <li>Seeks assistance when and if required</li> <li>Should spend more time and effort in completing her assignments to improve grade</li> </ul>	E	G	G	G	G	8	0
<b>Report Card Results – Semester Two: STACEY</b> February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 72%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	73 79 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates in a clear and concise manner</li> <li>Has successfully completed course expectations for Grade Nine French</li> <li>Has had a good term</li> </ul>	G	G	G	S	G	12	0
PPL 1O	66 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has demonstrated consistent effort when working with others in group activities</li> <li>Needs to spend more time preparing for tests and quizzes</li> <li>Should continue her good work</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	16	1
MPM 1D	56 70 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Displays some understanding of mathematical concepts presented</li> <li>Needs to seek extra help when it is required</li> <li>Has been a pleasure to teach</li> </ul>	S	S	S	S	S	9	0
AVI 1O	91 79 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completes studio projects with a high degree of refinement and quality</li> <li>Demonstrates outstanding ability in drawing technique</li> <li>Expresses and organizes ideas and information with a high degree of effectiveness</li> </ul>	E	E	E	E	E	16	0

Report Card Results – Semester One: MANDI									
September 2009 – February 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 88%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
ENG 1D	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Generates, gathers and organizes ideas to write for intended purposes/audiences</li><li>Makes a positive contribution to the class</li><li>Should maintain her excellent level of focus</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	10	6
AMA 1O	85	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates excellent ensemble performance skills</li><li>Is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic student</li><li>Should continue to do excellent work</li></ul>	G	E	G	G	E	8	6
BTT 1O	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Demonstrates considerable knowledge of computer terms – has good computer skills</li><li>Is a pleasure to have in the classroom</li><li>Should pursue Business Studies courses in the future</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	12	3
SNC 1D	88	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Has had a successful semester in Science</li><li>Puts forth consistent effort and has a strong ability in subject area</li><li>Is encouraged to continue her hard work in the future</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	12	0
Report Card Results – Semester Two: MANDI									
February 2010 – June 2010 (OVERALL AVERAGE – 84%)									
CODE	GRADE	TEACHER COMMENTS	LEARNING SKILLS					AB	L
			WI	T	O	H	I		
FSF 1D	81 79 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Has excellent writing and oral communication skills</li><li>Presents assignments that are well organized and carefully completed</li><li>Has had a great term</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	10	1
CGC 1D	90 74 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Analyzes/communicates geographical concepts and ideas with a high degree of clarity</li><li>Has a positive attitude in the learning environment</li><li>Is encouraged to pursue other senior level Geography courses</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	12	1
PPL 1O	87 82 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Puts forth a strong and consistent effort in all areas of this course</li><li>Makes a positive contribution to the classroom</li><li>Should continue her excellent work</li></ul>	E	E	E	E	E	15	3
MPM 1D	78 70 (M)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Has a good understanding of mathematical concepts presented</li><li>Is encouraged to participate more in class discussions</li><li>Hass been a pleasure to teach</li><li>Should continue her good efforts in Mathematics next year</li></ul>	E	E	E	G	E	12	3

## **APPENDIX M: Atlas.ti Code List**

### **ACTIVITIES, INTERESTS and CREATIVITY (AIC)**

- AIC1A** Actively pursuing creative interests in vocal music
- AIC1B** Actively pursuing creative interests in instrumental music
- AIC2A** Actively pursuing creative interests in drawing
- AIC2B** Actively pursuing creative interests in painting
- AIC2C** Actively pursuing creative interests in sculpture
- AIC2D** Actively pursuing creative interests in photography
- AIC3A** Actively pursuing individualized creative interest in drama e.g. stand-up comedy, acting
- AIC3B** Actively pursuing creative interest in drama in group context e.g. theatre, stage
- AIC4A** Actively pursuing individualized creative interest in dance
- AIC4B** Actively pursuing creative interest in dance in group context
- AIC5A** Actively pursuing creative interest in poetry writing and/or song lyrics
- AIC5B** Actively pursuing creative interest in short story writing, novel and/or script writing
- AIC6A** Demonstrating an ongoing interest in music groups and attending concerts
- AIC6B** Demonstrating an ongoing interest in singing styles and song lyrics
- AIC7A** Television viewing - television sitcoms
- AIC7B** Television viewing - animation and cartoons
- AIC7C** Television viewing - reality shows
- AIC7D** Television viewing - vampire and fantasy dramas
- AIC7E** Television viewing - crime and mystery dramas
- AIC8A** Movie preferences - satire and comedy
- AIC8B** Movie preferences - vampires and fantasy
- AIC8C** Movie preferences - animation
- AIC9A** Social networking time - at least an hour a day e.g. Facebook, MSN, Twitter
- AIC9B** Purposeful use for social networking identified
- AIC9C** Issues with peers in social networking context identified e.g. gossip, cyberbullying/texting
- AIC10A** Involved in online blogging e.g. deviant.art, My Space, online diaries
- AIC10B** Purposeful use for online blogging identified
- AIC11A** Dating - seriously involved in a particular relationship
- AIC11B** Dating - informally and on a regular basis
- AIC11C** Interested in someone, but not yet dating
- AIC11D** No apparent interest in dating
- AIC12A** Reading interest - horror genres
- AIC12B** Reading interests - fantasy genres
- AIC12C** Reading interests - biographies and non-fiction
- AIC12D** Reading interests - vampire/werewolf series
- AIC12E** Reading interests - the classics
- AIC12F** Reading interests - romance novels
- AIC13A** Video/computer games
- AIC13B** Board games/card games

### **EMOTIONS, FEELINGS and ENGAGEMENT (EFE)**

- EFE1A** Engagement – sharing positive feelings or emotions about classroom life  
e.g. happy, excited, content
- EFE2A** Engagement - sharing negative feelings or emotions about classroom life  
e.g. bored, frustrated, stressed
- EFE3A** Engagement – describing off-task classroom behaviours of disengaged participants  
e.g. daydreaming, defying the teacher, doodling, listening to ipod
- EFE4A** Engagement – identifying and explaining perceived cause(s) for negative feelings in the

- classroom
- EFE5A** Engagement – sharing positive feelings or emotions about family and home life  
e.g. happy, excited, content
  - EFE6A** Engagement – sharing negative feelings or emotions about family and home life  
e.g. bored, frustrated, stressed
  - EFE7A** Engagement – describing negative behaviours of participants at home  
e.g. isolating, arguing, fighting
  - EFE8A** Engagement – identifying and explaining perceived cause(s) for negative feelings  
toward family members
  - EFE9A** Engagement – sharing positive feelings or emotions about socializing with friends  
e.g. happy, excited, content
  - EFE10A** Engagement- sharing negative feelings or emotions about socializing with friends  
e.g. sad, angry, bored, frustrated
  - EFE11A** Engagement – describing negative behaviours of participants with friends  
e.g. yelling, ignoring, bullying
  - EFE12A** Engagement – identifying and explaining perceived cause(s) for negative feelings  
toward friends
  - EFE13A** At-risk behaviours - self-identifying risky behaviours shared  
e.g. partying, multiple sexual partners
  - EFE13B** At-risk behaviours - disclosing involvement in drugs, alcohol and tobacco
  - EFE13C** At-Risk behaviours – getting behind in credit accumulation
  - EFE13D** At-risk behaviours – skipping classes and acknowledging issues of truancy
  - EFE13E** At-risk behaviours – acknowledging parental supervision issues
  - EFE13F** At-risk behaviours – participating in self- mutilation e.g. multiple tattoos, piercings,
  - EFE13G** At-risk behaviours – acknowledging anger management issues  
e.g. physical fights, arrests, restraining orders
  - EFE14A** Explaining reason for participating in study - opportunity to collect the honorarium
  - EFE14B** Explaining reason for participating in study - opportunity to educate Grade 8 students  
about the Grade Nine experience
  - EFE14C** Explaining reason for participating in study - opportunity to process/understand the  
Grade Nine experience
  - EFE14D** Explaining reason for participating in study - opportunity to be heard
  - EFE14E** Explaining reason for participating in study - opportunity to become part of a research  
study i.e. something new to experience, curiosity

### **FAMILY LIFE (FL)**

- FL1A** Describing a discordant interaction with sibling(s)
- FL1B** Describing a positive interaction with sibling(s)
- FL2A** Describing a discordant interaction with mom/guardian
- FL2B** Describing a discordant interaction with dad/guardian
- FL2C** Describing a constructive interaction with mom
- FL2D** Describing a constructive interaction with dad
- FL3A** Participating in household chores/duties
- FL3B** Describing responsibility and care for household pet(s)
- FL3C** Describing instances of care-giving for sibling(s)/family member(s)
- FL4A** Participating in part-time and/or summer employment
- FL5A** Mom/guardian is full-time employed
- FL5B** Dad/guardian is full-time employed
- FL6A** Mom/guardian has a university education
- FL6B** Dad/guardian has a university education
- FL7A** Sports teams and individual sporting activities in off-school hours
- FL7B** Creative pursuits e.g. music, art, crafts, dance, writing in off-school hours
- FL7C** Youth groups, service clubs e.g. Girl Guides, Youth for Christ, Air Cadets,  
Volunteer Work in off-school hours



- FL8A** Hanging out with friends during off-school hours
- FL8B** Spending time with family members during off-school hours
- FL8C** Informal activities e.g. pick-up games, swimming, tobogganing, mall, arcades, amusement parks in off-school hours

### **IDENTITY FORMATION and DEVELOPMENT (IFD)**

- IFD1A** Physical changes - deliberate intent and purpose in self-transformation identified  
e.g. clothing, piercings, hair style and colour
- IFD2A** Physical transformation - positive outcomes and results are noted
- IFD2B** Physical transformation - negative outcomes and results are noted
- IFD3A** Attitudinal changes - deliberate intent and purpose in self-transformation identified  
e.g. more outgoing, less compliant
- IFD4A** Attitudinal transformation - positive outcomes and results are noted
- IFD4B** Attitudinal transformation - negative outcomes and results are noted
- IFD5A** Intelligence - enduring perception of self as having above average intellectual ability
- IFD5B** Intelligence - perception of self as having average intellectual ability
- IFD5C** Intelligence - perception of self as having below average intellectual ability
- IFD6A** Physical appearance - high level of self-acceptance
- IFD6B** Physical appearance - low level of self-acceptance
- IFD7A** Social status - perception of self as being very popular among classmates and peers
- IFD7B** Perceiving self as being moderately popular among classmates and peers
- IFD7C** Perceiving self as being unpopular among classmates and peers
- IFD8A** Artistic - enduring perception of self as an artistic and/or artsy individual
- IFD8B** Artistic - perception of self as being a moderately artistic and/or artsy individual
- IFD9A** Fashion - heavily influenced by fashion trends
- IFD9B** Fashion - somewhat influenced by fashion trends
- IFD9C** Fashion - not easily influence by fashion trends
- IFD10A** Beliefs - involved in traditional religious groups e.g. faith-based youth groups
- IFD10B** Beliefs - non-traditional spiritual influences identified e.g. wicca
- IFD10C** Beliefs - personal belief systems acknowledged and described
- IFD11A** Peer group - significantly influenced by and heavily involved in peer group
- IFD11B** Peer group - minimally influence by and minimally involved in peer group
- IFD11C** Peer group - changes in peer group and peer involvement over time have been identified
- IFD12A** Media - influence of media on participant's self-identity is recognized and promoted
- IFD12B** Media - influence of media on participant's dress style and choices is recognized and promoted
- IFD12C** Media - influence of media on participant's behaviours and attitude is recognized and promoted
- IFD13A** Creative capabilities - perception of self as having above average skills and creative ability
- IFD13B** Creative capabilities - perception of self as having average skills and creative abilities
- IFD13C** Creative capabilities - perception fo self as having below average skills and creative abilities
- IFD14A** Perspective on creativity - participant shows evidence of sophisticated thinking concerning the nature of creativity
- IFD15A** Creative development - hopes and dreams for creative development clearly articulated
- IFD15B** Creative development - future plans for creative pursuits and development shared
- IFD15C** Creative development - future plans for creative development have been abandoned
- IFD16A** Future career - a number of different career options are being considered
- IFD16B** Future career - specific career options are being considered and actively explored
- IFD16C** Future career - career pathway plans have been developed with a definite end goal in mind
- IFD16D** Future career - career plans have changed significantly in the past year

- IFD16E** Future career - career plans have NOT changed significantly in the past year
- IFD16F** Future career - future career options include a full-time career in the creative arts  
e.g. music, dance, visual arts, creative writing
- IFD16G** Future career - future career options include a part-time career in the creative arts on a  
part-time basis e.g. music, dance, drama, visual arts, creative writing

### **TRANSITIONING and SCHOOL LIFE (TSL)**

- TSL1A** Positive elementary school experience - overall
- TSL1B** Negative elementary school experience - overall
- TSL2A** Course selection decisions made by student
- TSL2B** Positive feelings about course selections made
- TSL2C** Negative feelings about course selections made
- TSL2D** Course selections made by parent/guardian/other
- TSL3A** Negative expectations before Grade Nine e.g. afraid, nervous
- TSL3B** Positive expectations before Grade Nine e.g. excited, happy
- TSL4A** Negative feelings after first day of Grade Nine e.g. afraid, nervous
- TSL4B** Positive feelings after first day of Grade Nine e.g. excited, happy
- TSL5A** Fully participating in Grade Nine orientation sessions
- TSL5B** Partially participating in Grade Nine orientation sessions
- TSL5C** Not participating in orientation sessions
- TSL6A** Describing high volume i.e. time spent completing homework in elementary school
- TSL6B** Describing low volume i.e. time spent completing homework in elementary school
- TSL6C** Describing high degree of homework difficulty in elementary school
- TSL6D** Describing low degree of homework difficulty in elementary school - easy
- TSL6E** Describing high degree of engagement with homework assignments in elementary school
- TSL6F** Describing low degree of engagement with homework assignments in elementary school
- TSL6G** Adequate teacher feedback concerning homework assignments in elementary school
- TSL6H** Inadequate teacher feedback concerning homework assignments in elementary school
- TSL7A** Describing high degree of difficulty in identified subject areas in elementary school e.g.  
Math, Science
- TSL7B** Describing low degree of difficulty in identified subject areas in elementary school  
e.g. Language Arts, Gym
- TSL8A** Describing high volume i.e. time spent completing homework in Grade Nine
- TSL8B** Describing low volume i.e. time spent completing homework in Grade Nine
- TSL8C** Describing high degree of homework difficulty in Grade Nine
- TSL8D** Describing low degree of homework difficulty in Grade Nine - easy
- TSL8E** Describing high degree of engagement with homework in Grade Nine
- TSL8F** Describing low degree of engagement with homework in Grade Nine
- TSL8G** Adequate teacher feedback concerning homework assignments in Grade Nine
- TSL8H** Inadequate teacher feedback concerning homework assignments in Grade Nine
- TSL9A** High degree of difficulty in identified subject areas in Grade Nine e.g. Math, Science
- TSL9B** Low level of difficulty in identified subject areas in Grade Nine e.g. English, Drama
- TSL10A** Assignment deadlines in elementary school - perceived as reasonable and/or flexible
- TSL10B** Assignment deadlines in elementary school - perceived as being unreasonable and/or  
rigid
- TSL10C** Adequate levels of support from teacher in elementary school
- TSL10D** Inadequate levels of support from teacher in elementary school
- TSL11A** Assignment deadlines in Grade Nine- perceived as being reasonable and/or flexible
- TSL11B** Assignment deadlines in Grade Nine - perceived as being unreasonable and/or rigid
- TSL11C** Adequate levels of support from teacher in Grade Nine
- TSL11D** Inadequate levels of support from teacher in Grade Nine
- TSL12A** Positive comments/feedback from teachers in elementary school
- TSL12B** Negative comments/feedback from teachers in elementary school
- TSL13A** Positive comments/feedback from teachers in Grade Nine

**TSL13B** Negative comments/feedback from teachers in Grade Nine  
**TSL14A** High marks in elementary grades e.g. A's  
**TSL14B** Fair marks in elementary grades e.g. B's and C's  
**TSL14C** Low marks in elementary grades e.g. D's  
**TSL15A** High marks in Grade Nine e.g. A's  
**TSL15B** Fair marks in Grade Nine e.g. B's and C's  
**TSL15C** Low marks Grade Nine e.g. D's  
**TSL16A** Participating in school-sponsored activities before school in elementary grades  
**TSL16B** Informal socializing before school in elementary grades  
**TSL17A** Participating in school-sponsored activities during lunch hour - elementary grades  
**TSL17B** Informal socializing during lunch hour - elementary grades  
**TSL18A** Participating in school-sponsored activities after school - elementary grades  
**TSL18B** Informal socializing after school - elementary grades  
**TSL19A** Participating in school-sponsored activities before school in Grade Nine  
**TSL19B** Informal socializing before school in Grade Nine  
**TSL20A** Participating in school-sponsored activities during lunch hour in Grade Nine  
**TSL20B** Informal socializing during lunch hour in Grade Nine  
**TSL21A** Participating in school-sponsored activities after school in Grade Nine  
**TSL21B** Informal socializing after school in Grade Nine  
**TSL22A** Participating in team sports in elementary school  
**TSL22B** Participating in individual sports in elementary school  
**TSL23A** Participating in school clubs and/or student government in elementary school  
**TSL24A** Participating in creative group activities in elementary school  
     e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing  
**TSL24B** Participating in creative individual activities in elementary school  
     e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing  
**TSL24B** Participating in individual sports in Grade Nine  
**TSL25A** Participating in team sports in Grade Nine  
**TSL26A** Participating in school clubs and/or student government in Grade Nine  
**TSL27A** Participating in creative group activities in Grade Nine  
     e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing  
**TSL27B** Participating in creative individual activities in Grade Nine  
     e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing  
**TSL28A** Describing positive teacher/student relationships in elementary school  
**TSL28B** Describing negative teacher/student relationships in elementary school  
**TSL29A** Describing positive teacher/student relationships in Grade Nine  
**TSL29B** Describing negative teacher/student relationships in Grade Nine  
**TSL30A** Describing high level of intellectual engagement in the classroom in Grade Nine  
**TSL30B** Describing low level of intellectual engagement in the classroom in Grade Nine  
**TSL31A** Describing high level of intellectual engagement in extracurricular activities Grade Nine  
     e.g. sports, clubs  
**TSL31B** Describing low level of intellectual engagement in extracurricular activities in Grade Nine  
     e.g. sports, clubs  
**TSL32A** Describing high level of creative engagement in the classroom in Grade Nine  
**TSL32B** Describing low level of creative engagement in the classroom in Grade Nine  
**TSL33A** Describing high level of creative engagement in extracurricular activities in Grade Nine  
     e.g. sports, clubs  
**TSL33B** Describing low level of creative engagement in extracurricular activities in Grade Nine  
     e.g. sports, clubs  
**TSL34A** Informally disciplined in elementary school i.e. detentions served  
**TSL34B** Formally disciplined in elementary school i.e. in-school/out-of-school suspensions  
**TSL34C** Good attendance and/or punctual for class in elementary school  
**TSL34D** Poor attendance and/or frequently late for class in elementary school  
**TSL35A** Informally disciplined in Grade Nine i.e. detentions served  
**TSL35B** Formally disciplined in Grade Nine i.e. in-school/out-of-school suspensions  
**TSL35C** Good attendance and/or punctual for class in Grade Nine

**TSL35D** Poor attendance and/or frequently late for class in Grade Nine

**TSL36A** Perceiving self as having a lot of good friends and getting along well with others in elementary school

**TSL36B** Perceiving self as having a few good friends and getting along with others in elementary school

**TSL36C** Perceiving self as having not many friends and finding it difficult to make friends in elementary school

**TSL36D** Perceiving self as being bullied and having very few friends in elementary school

**TSL37A** Perceiving self as having a lot of good friends and getting along well with others in Grade Nine

**TSL37B** Perceiving self as having a few good friends / getting along well with others - Grade Nine

**TSL37C** Perceiving self as having not many friends and finding it difficult to make friends in Grade Nine

**TSL37D** Perceiving self as being bullied and having very few friends in Grade Nine

**TSL38A** Positive Grade Nine experience - overall

**TSL38B** Negative Grade Nine experience - overall

**TSL39A** Advising other students to engage in more team sports in Grade Nine

**TSL39B** Advising other students to get involved in more school clubs in Grade Nine

**TSL39C** Advising other students to pay attention in class and do homework in Grade Nine

**TSL40A** Agreeing with statement that "School is incredibly boring and as soon as I'm old enough, I'm out of here."

**TSL40B** Agreeing with statement: "School is a lot of work, but I have enjoyed the challenge."

**TSL40C** Agreeing with statement: "I only go to school to see my friends and hang out with them."

**TSL40D** Agreeing with statement: "If it weren't for extracurricular activities, I would hate school."

**TSL40E** Agreeing with statement: "I have felt a lot of stress about school this year and dreaded going to school most days."

**TSL40F** Agreeing with statement: "I have a good time at school and enjoy all my classes."

## APPENDIX N: Atlas.ti Frequency Tables – All Codes

### CODES - ALL PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

HU: [C:\Documents and Settings\Anne\My Documents\Scientific Softwar...\Ph Data Interviews and Journals2.hpr6]

Code-Filter: All [244 Codes]

PD-Filter: All [36 Documents]

Quotation-Filter: All [2152 Quotations]

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S1: Lee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	
S2: Lee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
J0: Lee	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	
S1: Gail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
S2: Gail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	
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73	18	11	14	11	19	8	6	3	2	5	2	7	7	9	16	62	46	22	27	18	0	2	52	14	9	24	13	14	16	18	58	13	13	19	13	11	5	4	7	16	16			

	FL8A	FL8B	FL8C	IFD10A	IFD10B	IFD10C	IFD11A	IFD11B	IFD11C	IFD12A	IFD12B	IFD12C	IFD13A	IFD13B	IFD13C	IFD14A	IFD15A	IFD15B	IFD15C	IFD16A	IFD16B	IFD16D	IFD16E	IFD16F	IFD16G	IFD1A	IFD2A	IFD2B	IFD3A	IFD4A	IFD4B	IFD5A	IFD5B	IFD5C	IFD6A	IFD6B	IFD7A	IFD7B	IFD7C	IFD8A	
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[illegible]







## APPENDIX O: Atlas.ti – Categories, Sub-Categories and Codes

CATEGORY (Theme)	SUB- CATEGORY (Sub-Theme)	CODE (Indicator)	
ENGAGEMENT	Intellectual Disengagement	EFE13D	At-risk behaviours - skipping classes and/or issues of truancy
		EFE2A	Engagement - sharing negative feelings or emotions about classroom life e.g. bored, frustrated, stressed
		EFE3A	Engagement – being involved in off-task classroom behaviours of disengagement e.g. daydreaming, defiance,
		EFE4A	Engagement - identifying and explaining perceived cause(s) for negative feelings in the classroom
		IFD5C	Intelligence - perceiving self as having below average intellectual ability
		TSL11D	Inadequate levels of support from teacher in Grade Nine e.g. teacher was never available
		TSL13B	Negative comments/feedback from teachers in Grade Nine
		TSL15C	Low marks Grade Nine e.g. D's
		TSL2C	Negative feelings about course selections made
		TSL30B	Low level of intellectual engagement in the classroom in Grade Nine
		TSL38E	Negative Grade Nine experience - too much work and too difficult
		TSL38H	Negative Grade Nine experience - school is boring
		TSL40A	Agreeing with: "School is incredibly boring and as soon as I'm old enough, I'm out of here."
		TSL40E	Agreeing with: "I have felt a lot of stress about school this year and dreaded going to school most days."
		TSL8B	Low volume i.e. time spent completing homework in Grade Nine
		TSL8C	High degree of homework difficulty in Grade Nine
		TSL8F	Low degree of engagement with homework in Grade Nine
	Intellectual Engagement	EFE1A	Engagement - sharing positive feelings or emotions about classroom life e.g. happy, excited, content
		IFD16B	Future career - exploring specific career options are being considered and actively
		IFD5A	Intelligence - enduring perception of self as having above average intellectual ability
		TSL11C	Adequate levels of support from teacher in Grade Nine e.g. teacher helped me
		TSL13A	Positive comments/feedback from teachers in Grade Nine
		TSL15A	High marks in Grade Nine e.g. A's
		TSL2B	Positive feelings about course selections made
		TSL30A	High level of intellectual engagement in the classroom in Grade Nine
		TSL40B	Agreeing with statement: "School is a lot of work, but I have enjoyed the challenge."
		TSL40F	Agreeing with statement: "I have a good time at school and enjoy all my classes."
		TSL8A	High volume i.e. time spent completing homework in Grade Nine
		TSL8D	Low degree of homework difficulty in Grade Nine - easy
		TSL8E	High degree of engagement with homework in Grade Nine
		TSL8G	Adequate teacher feedback concerning homework assignments in Grade Nine
		TSL9B	Low level of difficulty in identified subject areas in Grade Nine e.g. English, Drama, Gym
	Social Disengagement – School Friends	AIC9C	Identifying issues with peers in social networking context e.g. gossip, cyberbullying, texting
		EFE10A	Engagement- sharing negative feelings about socializing with friends e.g. sad, angry, frustrated
		EFE11A	Engagement - describing negative behaviours of participants with friends e.g. yelling, ignoring, bullying
		EFE12A	Engagement - identifying and explaining perceived cause(s) for negative feelings toward friends
		IFD7C	Perceiving self as being unpopular among classmates and peers
		TSL37C	Perceiving self as having not many friends and finding it difficult to make friends in Grade Nine
		TSL37D	Perceiving self as being bullied and having very few friends in Grade Nine

	<b>Social Engagement – School Friends</b>	TSL38G	Negative Grade Nine experience - too much social drama e.g. gossip
		AIC11A	Dating - seriously involved in a particular relationship
		AIC11B	Dating - informally and on a regular basis
		IFD11A	Peer group - significantly influenced by and heavily involved in peer group e.g. cares what peers think
		IFD7A	Social status - perceiving self as being very popular among classmates and peers
		TSL19B	Informal socializing before school in Grade Nine
		TSL20B	Informal socializing during lunch hour in Grade Nine
		TSL21B	Informal socializing after school in Grade Nine
		TSL37A	Perceiving self as having a lot of good friends and getting along well with others in Grade Nine
		TSL38C	Positive Grade Nine experience - lots of opportunities to meet new people
	<b>Academic Disengagement – Nonconformance</b>	TSL40C	Agreeing with statement: "I only go to school to see my friends and hang out with them."
		EFE13B	At-risk behaviours - disclosing involvement in drugs, alcohol and tobacco
		EFE13D	At-risk behaviours - skipping classes and/or issues of truancy
		TSL11B	Assignment deadlines in Grade Nine - perceiving deadlines as being unreasonable and/or rigid
		TSL11D	Inadequate levels of support from teacher in Grade Nine e.g. teacher was never available
		TSL13B	Negative comments/feedback from teachers in Grade Nine
		TSL29B	Negative teacher/student relationships in Grade Nine
		TSL2C	Negative feelings about course selections made
		TSL35A	Informally disciplined in Grade Nine i.e. detentions served
		TSL35B	Formally disciplined in Grade Nine i.e. in-school/out-of-school suspensions
	<b>Academic Engagement – Conformance</b>	TSL35D	Poor attendance and/or frequently late for class in Grade Nine
		TSL11A	Assignment deadlines in Grade Nine - perceiving deadlines as being reasonable and/or flexible
		TSL11C	Adequate levels of support from teacher in Grade Nine e.g. teacher helped me
		TSL13A	Positive comments/feedback from teachers in Grade Nine
		TSL29A	Positive teacher/student relationships in Grade Nine
		TSL2B	Positive feelings about course selections made
		TSL35C	Good attendance and/or punctual for class in Grade Nine
		TSL39C	Advising other students to pay attention in class and do homework in Grade Nine
<b>TRANSITION</b>	<b>Involvement in Extracurricular Activities</b>	TSL19A	Participating in school-sponsored activities before school in Grade Nine
		TSL20A	Participating in school-sponsored activities during lunch hour in Grade Nine
		TSL21A	Participating in school-sponsored activities after school in Grade Nine
		TSL25A	Participating in team sports in Grade Nine
		TSL25B	Participating in individual sports in Grade Nine
		TSL26A	Participating in school clubs and/or student government in Grade Nine
		TSL27A	Participating in creative group activities in Grade Nine e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing
		TSL27B	Participating in creative individual activities in Grade Nine e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing
	<b>Transition Strategies Employed</b>	TSL33A	High level of creative engagement in extracurricular activities in Grade Nine e.g. sports, clubs
		IFD11C	Peer group - changes in peer group and peer involvement over time have been identified
		IFD1A	Physical changes – identifying/describing deliberate self-transformation e.g. piercings, hair style
		IFD2A	Physical transformation -noting positive outcomes of transformation
		IFD2B	Physical transformation - noting negative outcomes of transformation
		IFD3A	Attitudinal changes - identifying deliberate purpose in self-transformation e.g. more outgoing, less compliant
		IFD4A	Attitudinal transformation - noting positive outcomes of transformation

		IFD4B	Attitudinal transformation - noting negative outcomes of transformation
<b>IDENTITY &amp; CREATIVITY</b>	<b>Negative Perceptions of Family Relationships</b>	EFE6A	Engagement - sharing negative feelings/emotions about family life e.g. bored, frustrated, stressed
		EFE7A	Engagement - describing negative behaviours of participants at home e.g. isolating, arguing, fighting
		EFE8A	Engagement - identifying and explaining perceived cause for negative feelings toward family members
		FL1A	Interacting negatively with sibling(s)
		FL2A	Interacting negatively with mom/guardian
		FL2B	Interacting negatively with dad/guardian
		FL2E	Disclosing issues between parents e.g. fighting, separated and/or divorced
	<b>Positive Perceptions of Family Relationships</b>	EFE5A	Engagement - sharing positive feelings or emotions about family and home life e.g. happy, excited, content
		FL1B	Interacting positively with sibling(s)
		FL2C	Interacting positively with mom
		FL2D	Interacting positively with dad
	<b>Negative Self-Perception</b>	AIC11C	Indicating interest in an individual and/or individuals, but not yet dating
		AIC11D	Not indicating an apparent interest in dating
		AIC9C	Identifying issues with peers in social networking context e.g. gossip, cyberbullying, texting
		IFD13C	Creative capabilities - perceiving self as having below average skills and creative abilities
		IFD1A	Physical changes - identifying and describing deliberate intentions for self-transformation e.g. piercings, hair style
		IFD3A	Attitudinal changes - identifying deliberate intent and purpose in self-transformation e.g. more outgoing, less compliant
		IFD5C	Intelligence - perceiving self as having below average intellectual ability
		IFD6B	Physical appearance - indicating a low level of self-acceptance
		IFD7C	Perceiving self as being unpopular among classmates and peers
		TSL36C	Perceiving self as having not many friends and finding it difficult to make friends in elementary school
		TSL36D	Perceiving self as being bullied and having very few friends in elementary school
		TSL37C	Perceiving self as having not many friends and finding it difficult to make friends in Grade Nine
		TSL37D	Perceiving self as being bullied and having very few friends in Grade Nine
	<b>Positive Self-Perception</b>	IFD13A	Creative capabilities - perceiving self as having above average skills and creative ability
		IFD5A	Intelligence - enduring perception of self as having above average intellectual ability
		IFD6A	Physical appearance - indicating a high level of self-acceptance
		IFD7A	Social status - perceiving self as being very popular among classmates and peers
		IFD8A	Artistic - enduring perception of self as an artistic and/or artsy individual
		TSL36A	Perceiving self as having a lot of good friends and getting along well with others in elementary school
		TSL36B	Perceiving self as having a few good friends and getting along with others in elementary school
		TSL37A	Perceiving self as having a lot of good friends and getting along well with others in Grade Nine
		TSL37B	Perceiving self as having a few good friends and getting along well with others in Grade Nine
	<b>Creative Personal Identity</b>	FL7B	Participating in creative pursuits e.g. music, art, crafts, dance, writing in off-school hours
		IFD13A	Creative capabilities - perceiving self as having above average skills and creative ability
		IFD15A	Creative development - clearly articulating hopes and dreams for creative development
		IFD16F	Future career - future career options include a full-time career in the creative arts e.g. music, dance, arts, writing

		IFD16G	Future career - future career options include a part-time career in the creative arts on a part-time basis e.g. music, dance, drama, arts, writing
		IFD8A	Artistic - enduring perception of self as an artistic and/or artsy individual
		TSL24A	Participating in creative group activities in elementary school e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing
		TSL24B	Participating in creative individual activities in elementary school e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography
		TSL27A	Participating in creative group activities in Grade Nine e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing
		TSL27B	Participating in creative individual activities in Grade Nine e.g. drama, music, visual arts, photography, writing
	<b>Creative Pursuits – Outside School Hours</b>	AIC10A	Actively participating in online blogging e.g. Deviant.art, My Space, Stickam, online diaries
		AIC12A	Reading interests - horror genres
		AIC12B	Reading interests - fantasy genres
		AIC12C	Reading interests - biographies and non-fiction
		AIC12D	Reading interests - vampire/werewolf series
		AIC12E	Reading interests - the classics
		AIC12F	Reading interests - romance novels
		AIC1A	Actively pursuing creative interests in vocal music
		AIC1B	Actively pursuing creative interests in instrumental music
		AIC2A	Actively pursuing creative interests in drawing
		AIC2B	Actively pursuing creative interests in painting
		AIC2C	Actively pursuing creative interests in sculpture
		AIC2D	Actively pursuing creative interests in photography
		AIC3A	Actively pursuing individualized creative interest in drama e.g. stand-up comedy, acting
		AIC3B	Actively pursuing creative interest in drama in group context e.g. theatre, stage
		AIC4A	Actively pursuing individualized creative interest in dance
		AIC4B	Actively pursuing creative interest in dance in group context
		AIC5A	Actively pursuing creative interest in poetry writing and/or writing song lyrics
		AIC5B	Actively pursuing creative interest in short story writing, novel and/or script writing
		AIC6A	Demonstrating an ongoing interest in music groups and attending concerts
		AIC6B	Demonstrating an ongoing interest in styles of music and song lyrics

## APPENDIX P: Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking – Summary of Scores

### PARTICIPANT SCORES: *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking – Verbal Form A*

NAME*	FLUENCY			FLEXIBILITY			ORIGINALITY			BATTERY AVERAGE	
	RS	NP	SS	RS	SS	NP	RS	SS	NP	SS	NP
Gail	85	53	101	47	109	68	65	113	75	108	66
Niki	92	61	106	43	102	55	65	113	75	107	64
Lee	148	97	138	62	136	96	102	134	96	136	98
Ally	106	76	114	40	97	44	84	125	89	112	74
Alexis	95	64	107	52	118	82	63	112	72	112	74
Leila	80	47	98	50	114	77	66	114	76	109	68
Britany	151	98	140	59	131	94	119	143	98	138	98
Tina	70	33	91	42	101	51	46	99	48	97	42
Shelly	53	12	77	33	84	21	33	88	27	83	16
Anna	74	39	94	46	107	65	54	105	61	102	53
Stacey	79	45	98	40	97	44	58	108	66	101	51
Mandi	73	37	94	48	111	71	58	108	66	104	57

\*Names are fictional

**RS** = Raw Scores

**NP** = National Percentile

**SS** = Standard Score

**NOTE:**

Scores based on Torrance Verbal Normative Data Tables – Verbal Form A (Torrance, 1990)

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